

Town of Amherst Massachusetts



Master Plan



Adopted by the Amherst Planning Board
February 3, 2010

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Master Plan

1. Introduction

A. General

Town Meeting voted funds for Amherst’s Master Plan in 2006. The effort was led by the appointed Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC) with at-large members and others from town committees and civic groups. The CPC worked closely with the national consulting firm of ACP–Visioning and Planning in order to facilitate the process, known as *Planning Amherst Together*, and to develop the draft Master Plan that was presented to the Planning Board for its review and adoption.

A Master Plan is a community’s “blueprint” for its future. As such, it is the broadest policy document a community can have to guide decision-making on long-term physical development over a period of decades or even generations. The Town of Amherst’s Master Plan addresses a variety of topics including land use, housing, economic development, natural and cultural resources, parks and open space, community services and facilities/utilities, transportation, and implementation.

Although a Master Plan is required under Massachusetts state law, the Town of Amherst hasn’t prepared a Master Plan since 1969. While Amherst has undertaken many innovative planning projects over the past 38 years, none of these studies were comprehensive in nature and none were formally adopted.

This Plan—the first in nearly 40 years—was based on significant public input throughout the planning process. This input was integrated with research on the community’s existing conditions and anticipated trends for the future. It was the charge of the Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC) to understand these findings and deliberate on appropriate recommendations for the future. This Master Plan represents the community’s best effort to balance competing interests and complex and intertwined issues.

B. Organization of the Report

M.G.L. Chapter 41, Section 81D of Massachusetts law requires a local planning board to develop a master plan for its community. (See <http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/41-81d.htm>.) The law requires the plan to be consistent in its policies, forecasts, and standards. It also outlines a series of elements that must be addressed in the plan. Accordingly, this Master Plan for the Town of Amherst is organized based on the following structure:

- **Chapter 2: Goals & Policies** - Addresses the overarching vision, goals, and priorities for the community as developed through the interactive public process.
- **Chapter 3: Land Use** – Describes the proposed distribution, location, inter-relationship, and character of land uses in the

community. This chapter provides a land use map and identifies specific planning initiatives to guide future development in Amherst.

- **Chapter 4: Demographics and Housing** – Outlines housing needs and objectives, including approaches for the preservation of existing housing stock and development of new units that will diversify Amherst’s housing choices. Strategies to promote affordability represent a key component of this element.
- **Chapter 5: Economic Development** – Identifies policies to support expansion of the Town’s economic base and provide for further employment opportunities.
- **Chapter 6: Natural and Cultural Resources** – Provides a number of strategies designed to protect and enhance the Town’s significant natural, cultural, and historic resources.
- **Chapter 7: Open Space and Recreation** – Outlines information about significant open spaces and recreational facilities in Amherst, and provides policies and strategies to support the protection, management, and expansion of such areas.
- **Chapter 8: Services and Facilities** – Analyzes existing and forecasted needs for public services and facilities in Amherst, and provides policies to guide their expansion.
- **Chapter 9: Transportation and Circulation** – Examines existing and proposed circulation and transportation systems. This chapter emphasizes the importance of expanding alternative and public transportation options and reducing reliance on the private automobile.
- **Chapter 10: Implementation** – Identifies specific actions that are necessary to achieve the objectives of the Master Plan. Steps to be taken by the Planning Board, the Master Plan Implementation Committee and the Town boards/committees and departments responsible for specific areas of Amherst’s public interest include developing action plans that identify appropriate responsible entities and establish timelines for completion of strategies.

Appendix

- A. **Implementation Matrix** – This checklist of Master Plan strategies is to be used by those responsible for developing action plans.

Supporting Documents

The following supporting documents were prepared as part of the master planning process. Copies can be obtained from the Amherst Planning Department or and can be accessed through the Town’s webpage:

- A. Existing Conditions and Trends Report. This report compiles research and analysis that formed the technical foundation of the Plan.

- B. Ideas for the Future. This represents a complete list of ideas collected from the public, and organized by topic.
- C. Community Choices Public Meeting Results. This report details the results of the Community Choices event held in early 2007, which was designed to gather feedback from the public on the draft goals and land use principles.
- D. Community Survey Results. This document represents a compilation of the survey responses arranged numerically.

2. Goals and Policies



Master Plan

A. Overview

Amherst is a highly desirable community in which to live, work, study, and play. It also is a town experiencing change. While change at some level is inevitable, both the rate and character of change in Amherst have been significant in recent decades. The key questions before the community—and the essence of the master planning effort—are “What kind of community do we want Amherst to be in the future?” and “What do we need to do about it today?”

This Master Plan is an attempt to capture the community’s aspirations and confront the challenges that Amherst faces. The community struggles to maintain its quality of life in the face of fiscal challenges exacerbated by diminishing state tax support. A significant amount of land in Amherst is permanently protected. Development of remaining unprotected open space continues, primarily for expensive single-family housing. Demographic changes and University expansion put pressure on housing and Town services. Land costs and housing costs continue to rise. These and other interrelated issues impact the lives of individual residents as well as the future of the community as a whole.

By addressing issues of growth and development, this Plan also seeks to preserve and enhance the character of Amherst community life—fundamental civility, access to public resources and decision-making, cohesive neighborhoods, ongoing cultural activities, and the preservation of longstanding community-defining traditions in the face of the change and fluidity imposed by a highly transient population.

This Master Plan—Amherst’s first in nearly 40 years—seeks to create a framework for addressing the challenges and realizing the aspirations of the Amherst community. The Plan uses words, maps, and illustrations to describe shared expectations for the types, location, and intensity of future development. It also outlines an implementation schedule for the actions necessary to achieve the Plan’s objectives.

In using this document—and especially when implementing its recommendations—there are two very important points to keep in mind:

- Dynamic Nature of a Master Plan:** This document is not intended to be forever fixed. It will require diligence to continually monitor the relevance, priorities, and progress of this Plan. Members of Town boards and committees, elected and appointed Town officials, members of Town Meeting, and all interested citizens will be responsible for keeping abreast of the needs of the Town, for bringing new ideas to those responsible for implementing the

Master Plan, and for ensuring that the Plan is being used effectively. The Implementation Chapter prescribes specific actions that will help the Town evaluate, interpret, and amend the Plan. Adoption of this Master Plan is the beginning, not the end, of the process.

- **Need for Action:** There are many pressing needs in the community, and growth and development pressures continue. Many of the priorities identified in this Plan beg for action sooner rather than later. For example, the Town’s regulatory tools need to be comprehensively reviewed and updated to protect and create the kind of physical environment desired by town residents.

B. Process Highlights

The Comprehensive Planning Committee encouraged a high level of public participation in the *Planning Amherst Together* master planning process in an effort to develop a community consensus on hopes and expectations for the future of Amherst. *Planning Amherst Together* was a multi-step open community-based planning process involving hundreds of Amherst citizens taking advantage of multiple opportunities to share and discuss their ideas about how to maintain and build on Amherst’s best qualities. *Planning Amherst Together* considered the crucial issues confronting Amherst. It built upon past planning efforts, provided new technical information, and created multiple opportunities for public input and guidance.

A timeline of major activities can be found in the table below.

Table 1.1 Planning Amherst Together – Timeline of Major Activities

Activity (* signifies a public involvement activity)	Timeframe
Public Idea Gathering Meetings * - Several large public brainstorming sessions to identify community needs, concerns, and desires.	Fall 2006
Technical Research, Drafting of Existing Conditions and Trends Report – Staff and consultant data-gathering.	Summer/Fall 2006
Work Group Workshops * - Groups of citizens assigned to focus on specific aspects of the community in open sessions.	Winter/Spring 2007
Community Choices * - Priority setting meetings.	March 2007
Community Survey * - A professionally-conducted survey of community preferences.	Summer 2007
Develop Draft Master Plan	Summer 2007
Last Call * - Mailing to Town Meeting members	Aug./Sept. 2007
Open House * - Review of the initial draft master plan.	October 2007
Revise and Finalize Master Plan – Work by a CPC subcommittee.	November 2007 – Nov. 2008
Planning Board Review and Adoption *	Nov. 2008 - (TBD)

The resulting Master Plan records and synthesizes the intentions of the hundreds of community residents participating, spells out priorities and actions, and identifies implementation and public decision-making procedures through which future priorities and actions can be identified and pursued in a timely and responsible fashion.

C. Key Directions for the Community

This section summarizes the key directions that the community has said it wants Amherst to go in the foreseeable future. Taken together, these directions constitute the vision inherent in this Plan. These directions arise from public sentiment expressed throughout the *Planning Amherst Together* process, an analysis of the Plan's objectives and strategies, and the deliberations of the CPC. Although the Master Plan consists of distinctive elements, these key directions highlight the principal shared themes found in the following chapters.

Sustainability is a primary integrating goal of the Amherst community and this Master Plan. A broadly-accepted definition of sustainability first appeared in *Our Common Future*, a 1987 report commissioned by the United Nations:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The goal of sustainability underlies each of the key directions for Amherst's Master Plan:

- **Maintain Amherst's existing community character.** The preservation of Amherst's community character will require a variety of different approaches, including protecting and promoting adaptive reuse of historic buildings and landscapes, focusing development in already-developed areas, creating design standards that ensure new development is in accord with existing neighborhood character, protecting critical conservation lands and farmland, and promoting the local agricultural economy. The residents of Amherst have a strong interest in maintaining the character of their community for years to come, and the use of appropriate tools such as form-based zoning and conservation easements will help to ensure that this goal is achieved.
- **Encourage vitality in the downtown and village centers.** Amherst's downtown and village centers should be a focus for the community's economic life, cultural vigor, and social activity. Vitality in these areas can be pursued through a variety of initiatives, including encouraging additional housing development, economic investment, expansion of cultural facilities, promotion of a mix of uses, and improvements to the public realm (parks,

streetscapes, and public squares). These initiatives will lead to a more walkable community, allow for more day-to-day interactions among residents, and attract more visitors to the community while enhancing Amherst's growing tourism industry.

- **Balance land preservation objectives with more intensive development in appropriate areas.** Perhaps the most significant theme that surfaced throughout the *Planning Amherst Together* process is the need to protect the Town's significant open spaces, including wildlife habitats, farmland, recreational lands, scenic vistas, and environmentally sensitive areas. Conservation of large tracts of land will require trade-offs in other areas. For example, in order to deal with rising land prices that can result from reducing the supply of buildable land, higher density development must be allowed and incentives must be developed to direct more growth and increased economic activity to the appropriate areas. A mix of uses should likewise be promoted to encourage a more walkable community and bring residents closer to jobs, shops, and services. This Master Plan tries to address these trade-offs, striking a balance between land preservation and the need for intensified responsible development in Amherst.
- **Provide housing that meets the needs of all residents while minimizing impacts on the environment.** Amherst values its economic and cultural diversity. Sustaining this diversity now and into the future will require addressing the needs of large segments of the population, including both renters and homeowners, that are financially strained by rising housing costs. It is critically important to encourage a broad mix of housing types with a full range of initiatives designed to preserve, develop, and/or replenish the community's low and moderate income affordable housing inventory. Housing strategies must also ensure that the mix of housing in the Town meets the varying physical needs of all residents and is affordable to the broadest spectrum of a growing community while minimizing the impact of housing development on the environment.
- **Provide community services to meet the needs of all residents.** Amherst is becoming an increasingly diverse community in terms of ethnicity, age, income, education, physical ability, and in many other ways. Amherst's services and facilities must keep pace with the population's changing needs, including maintaining its historically strong schools, planning for needed fire department, public works, school, library, and recreation facilities, and providing critical social support services.
- **Diversify and expand the economic base.** Amherst should pursue policies and regulations that encourage the diversification and

expansion of its economic base in a manner consistent with the community's character and desires. This will generate fiscal benefits for the community, provide revenue to pay for community services, create more private sector job opportunities for residents, and reduce dependence on the University and colleges as the economic engines of the community.

- **Enhance Town/Gown relations and cooperation.** The Town of Amherst and the educational institutions that are located within its boundaries have a symbiotic relationship. The University and colleges are major employers and provide economic support to local businesses; they also enhance the cultural opportunities available to Amherst residents. On the other hand, Amherst taxpayers provide a wide variety of public facilities and services to the large student population, with limited opportunities to obtain fiscal support for these services through local fees or taxation. A central theme of this plan is the need to enhance cooperation between Amherst, the University, and colleges in order to more equitably share the costs and benefits of this symbiotic relationship.
- **Promote an ethic of sustainable environmental and energy practices in all Town activities.** Amherst citizens have a high degree of awareness regarding environmental and energy issues. This Plan details ways to protect natural resources, conserve energy, reduce reliance on the private automobile, promote healthier lifestyles, and encourage green building techniques. Public outreach and education will be a key component in supporting this ethic of sustainability throughout the community. Requiring greater sustainability in Town policies, regulations and practices can enhance Amherst's ability to provide jobs, housing, security, education, and the other elements of a good life. This can set the tone for the community, help ensure environmental justice, and serve as an example for local businesses and developers.

D. Policy Foundation for the Plan

The policy foundation of the Plan was shaped by an extensive community involvement and planning process. The Master Plan has three key layers of policies: goals, objectives and strategies. Goals are the broadest policy statements that state a desired outcome in general terms. Objectives indicate a more specific policy direction and help organize strategies. Strategies are detailed actions necessary to initiate or complete an objective – such as a project, program or policy. There are multiple objectives for each goal and multiple strategies for each objective.

Goals and Objectives

This Plan includes goals, objectives, and strategies which are described in detail in the following seven chapters and summarized in Chapter 10: Implementation. The goals and objectives are listed below.

Land Use: A sustainable, attractive town with a vital downtown and viable mixed-use village centers well connected to livable and diverse neighborhoods and campuses, and interwoven with protected open space, natural resources, and active farmland.

- Preferentially direct future development to existing built-up areas.
- Create vital downtown and village centers (areas of mixed use, including retail, commercial, and residential elements) that are walkable, attractive and efficient.
- Preserve key un-developed lands.
- Protect key farmland and farming in Amherst.
- Identify and inventory key locations for business development, and adopt land use regulations that can help broaden the Town's business tax base while avoiding inappropriate businesses, big boxes, heavy industry, etc.
- Guide new housing growth so as to minimize impact on Amherst's open space and small-town rural character.
- Identify appropriate locations for future municipal recreation facilities.
- Create a process/committee/mechanism for sorting competing public and private interests in public projects and on individual properties.
- Honor the historical/cultural character and beauty of neighborhoods.
- Utilize "greenways" and walkways to tie neighborhoods, public spaces, etc. together and make it easier for Amherst residents to walk or bicycle to more destinations.

Demographics and Housing: A mix of housing that meets the physical needs of and is affordable to the broadest possible spectrum of our community, and that minimizes the impact on the environment.

- Encourage a greater mix of housing types, sizes, and prices serving a wider range of income levels than is currently available throughout Amherst. Encourage the development of economically diverse neighborhoods.
- Preserve and expand the number of affordable and moderately priced rental and ownership units in the housing stock.
- Revise the zoning code to promote infill development in strategic locations.
- Increase the opportunity for infill development and the location of housing development near services.
- Encourage the production of housing in an environmentally sound manner, with respect to design, siting, materials and resource use.

- Encourage housing that meets the needs of special populations.
- Improve housing and services for people in the area who are homeless.
- Support the creation of taxable student housing that will lessen the pressures on residential neighborhoods.
- Build and sustain the Town’s capacity for regulatory oversight over Amherst’s housing stock, and pursue ways to enhance security.

Economic Development: To strengthen, diversify and grow the economic base and employment opportunities in the town, through smart development in the downtown, village centers, and commercial zones. Initiatives will be focused on clusters of businesses, mixed services, high technology/clean industries, cultural attractions, education, tourism and agricultural resources. Such development will maintain, improve and sustain quality of life, ecological consciousness and social values.

- Support sustainable growth of existing businesses and attract new ones while protecting environmental values.
- Support “relocalization” of the Amherst economy.
- Promote downtown as a key cultural, commercial and entertainment center of Amherst.
- Broaden and leverage partnerships with UMass and the Colleges.
- Improve regulatory environment to encourage business development.
- Create an Integrated Economic Development Program.
- Encourage physical and technological infrastructure that support business & industrial growth.
- Develop the current and future workforce to enhance economic opportunities.
- Advocate for changes to state tax regulation in order to allow a reformulation of the town’s tax structure.

Natural and Cultural Resources: Preserve the town’s historic fabric and agrarian and academic heritage, and protect the quality of our natural resources, to ensure a vibrant, diverse, sustainable community.

- Promote the preservation, appreciation, and sustainable use of our historical and cultural resources for residents and visitors.
- Provide support for a rich variety of cultural opportunities, and activities for all groups and individuals in the community.
- Conserve land in sufficient quantity and quality to meet agricultural, recreational, and wildlife needs.
- Apply principles of environmental sustainability town-wide.

Open Space and Recreation: Protect and enhance our rural character and agricultural viability, and provide and develop multi-use and multi-generational recreational opportunities that bring townspeople together.

- Protect land parcels that provide significant value for agriculture, watershed protection, trail systems, habitat, and biodiversity attributes.
- Improve the economic viability of the farm community within Amherst.
- Provide accessible, well-maintained recreational facilities that meet the changing needs of the community.
- Institutionalize a process for rationalizing competing public land use interests.

Services and Facilities: To provide excellent, cost effective, accessible facilities, services, and programs reflecting values respectful of our ages and our diversity, which, through collaboration, contribute to a high quality safe, civil, healthy, and sustainable community.

- Deliver high quality public safety services.
- Deliver high quality education from pre-school through grade 12.
- Provide high quality facilities, services, and programs that serve the needs of all the people of Amherst.
- Maintain and enhance Town infrastructure and facilities consistent with best practices.
- Anticipate, plan and budget for large projects in response to growing demand on Town services.
- Take a leadership role in promoting environmentally sound practices in services and facilities.
- Strengthen partnerships with colleges and University and improve coordination of services and facilities.
- Incorporate emerging technologies, such as wireless networking technology, into future infrastructure planning.

Transportation: A balanced, inclusive, accessible, safe, environmentally responsible transportation and circulation system that serves users of public transit, pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers, and that is connected within and among different modes both in town and to the region.

- Plan for an integrated Town-wide transportation system.
- Actively promote alternative modes of transportation.
- Increase the frequency, connectivity, and utility of public transit services to meet the needs of residents throughout the community.
- Observe transportation demand management principles in local planning and regulation.
- Within the context of community transportation demand management planning, provide for adequate parking to support existing and desired new development in the downtown and elsewhere.
- Improve the flow of traffic on major roadways and residential streets to reduce congestion and improve safety.
- Engage in traffic management initiatives with businesses and employers.

- Aggressively pursue funding strategies for achieving transportation goals.

Implementation: Once the Master Plan has been finalized, the community will need to shift its energies towards successfully implementing the strategies it has identified.

- Provide resources for implementing the Master Plan.
- Monitor and evaluate implementation of the Master Plan.
- Involve a wide variety of stakeholders in implementation.
- Develop appropriate regulatory tools to implement the Master Plan.
- Require concurrence of Town actions with the Master Plan.
- Update the Master Plan at least every five years.

Other Plans Incorporated by Reference

The key directions, policies, objectives, and strategies in each chapter of this Master Plan build upon decades of previous community planning efforts by Amherst citizens. This Plan incorporates and implements aspects of past strategic plans and policy documents, as well as current reports and studies guiding the ongoing activity of Town boards/committees and departments. This Master Plan has been developed to be consistent with all applicable current regional and state plans and policies regarding community planning.

Specific policies or recommended actions in past plans and documents may have been superseded or may upon review be found to be in conflict with the provisions of this Plan. Under the provisions of M.G.L. Ch. 41, Section 81D, interpretations of this Plan, as well as necessary amendments between Plan updates, shall be made by the Planning Board following public review according to procedures established under this Plan (see Chapter 10, Implementation).

E. Priority Implementation

The following actions represent the initial priorities for implementation of this Master Plan for members of Town boards and committees, elected and appointed Town officials, Town staff, Town Meeting members, and all interested citizens.

Undertake the following additional community planning steps:

- Complete the comprehensive inventory and evaluation of lands, resources, services, and facilities in Amherst under each element of this Plan, to provide a responsible basis for future planning and public decision-making.
- Conduct a public process using the completed inventory and evaluations, to determine and map the following general categories of geographic areas in Amherst:

~ *Areas to Protect* – Areas dominated by critical community resources (environmental, historic, cultural, etc.) requiring significant protections from development.

~ *Areas to Develop* – Areas available and suitable for infill, redevelopment, and/or more intensive new development for housing, commercial activity, public facilities and infrastructure.

~ *Areas of Compromise* – Areas that include a closely-woven mixture of critical resources and developable lands, so that meeting the community’s urgent needs for both preservation and development will require a carefully planned approach of balance and compromise.

- Based on the results of the above process, comprehensively revise and coordinate Amherst’s development regulations—zoning bylaw and map, subdivision regulations, local wetlands regulations, health regulations, etc.—to reflect the key directions of this Master Plan, to ensure desired future patterns of development, and to improve consistency, efficiency, and fairness in Amherst’s growth regulations.

Undertake the following specific planning projects and action steps:

- Create a “Green Infrastructure” Plan: Build on the work embodied in the Climate Action Plan to address future growth patterns, and comprehensively assess and amend existing community plans, policies, and regulations according to principles of environmental sustainability by increasing energy efficiency and reducing Amherst’s carbon footprint. See LU.1.E, LU.1.G, and Objectives NC.4 and S.4.
- Create and assertively implement a strategic Economic Development Plan for Amherst that is consistent with community values, assigning responsibility for this task to a new or existing standing Town committee with appropriate staff support. See Objective E.6.
- Update the Affordable Housing Plan in a manner consistent with this Master Plan, and fund and implement priority actions to improve the mix of housing available to Amherst residents. See Chapter 4.
- Develop and implement a Transportation Plan which supports Amherst’s land use, housing, economic development, and other public interests in a manner consistent with this Master Plan and its intentions for community sustainability over time. See T.1.A.
- Pursue and refine agreements for increased cooperation and sharing of service burdens with Amherst’s educational institutions, nearby towns, and appropriate regional entities. See Objective S.7.
- Create a representative master plan implementation committee to monitor and assist with the implementation of this Plan. See Chapter 10.
- Provide sufficient operating and capital funding and staff resources to accomplish priority implementation steps. See Objective IM.1.



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Relevant existing and past plans and policy documents:

- *Valley Vision 2, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission [Sept. 2007]*
- *Build-Out Analysis and Future Growth Study [2002]*
- *Atkins Corner Sustainable Development Master Plan – Action Steps for a Better Amherst [November 2000 – February 2002]*
- *Final Report of the Select Committee on Goals (SCOG) [1973]*

3. Land Use

A. Goal

A sustainable, attractive town with a viable, mixed-use downtown and active village centers that are well connected with livable and diverse neighborhoods and campuses, and interwoven with protected open space, natural resources, and active farmland.

B. Overview

This Land Use chapter represents the fundamental element of the Town of Amherst’s Master Plan. Policy decisions about the community’s land use, including zoning code revisions, will directly impact all other elements of this plan. Several key ideas recur throughout this chapter, including: the protection of Amherst’s unique landscape through the preservation of significant natural, scenic, and agricultural lands; the importance of directing future growth towards existing built-up areas such as the downtown and village centers; improving the Town’s fiscal health through strategic land development; and the need to guide new development in a manner that respects the Town’s history and existing community character.

C. Existing Conditions

The assessment of the Town’s existing land use conditions is the result of technical research, as well as discussions with the CPC and Town Staff. This section summarizes the key land use conditions:

- **Current land use patterns:** Dominant land uses include residential (23 percent of land area) protected agricultural (18 percent), conservation (18 percent), and land owned by Amherst’s three institutions of higher education (16 percent). The Town has a relatively small amount of land (3.6 percent) designated as commercial, retail, or industrial zones.
- **Land consumption outpacing population growth:** Recent trends indicate that development of single family dwellings in Amherst has been consuming relatively more land per new residence

to accommodate new residents. This is an indicator of “sprawl”. Since the year 2000, the total developed land area in Amherst that consists of residential lots larger than ½ acre grew by 65 percent, while Amherst’s population remained relatively stable.

- **Land preservation priorities:** Preservation of the community’s unique rural landscape is a key priority in Amherst. Approximately half of the Town’s land currently enjoys some form of protection from development, and a significant percentage (4,850 acres, or 27.3 percent) of the community’s total land area (17,762.5 acres) is permanently protected. Amherst’s principal tool for managing growth has been 40 years of an aggressive conservation land acquisition program resulting in Town ownership of over 1,700 acres of open space, and development limitations of other kinds on an equivalent additional area. The continued protection of these significant land areas will help the community retain its rural character, even as growth occurs.
- **Increasing land values and affordability concerns:** Due to the nature of supply and demand, land prices will continue to rise as more demands are placed on finite land resources. Increasing land values drive up housing costs in the community, leading to growing concerns about housing affordability. Other demographic trends such as the shift towards smaller households place additional pressure on the housing stock, as more units are needed to house the same population.
- **Need for intensified development:** Ultimately, the preservation of land in Amherst must be coupled with the intensification of development in appropriate areas of the community. More land can be conserved if higher density development is directed to the downtown, village centers and specific districts and neighborhoods.
- **Need to protect community character:** The Amherst community takes pride in the historic character of its developed areas. Even as higher density development occurs, design standards can

help to ensure that such new development is in accordance with the character and needs of the community. Design standards can also be used to support the development of well-connected, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use neighborhoods.

- **Need to revise zoning codes:** Revision of Amherst’s current zoning is necessary in order to address the land use needs listed above and to facilitate implementation of the strategies described in the following section.

The Objectives and Strategies and the Land Use Plan Map discussed in the remainder of this chapter provide a coherent framework for approaching Amherst’s future land use and reconciling the need to preserve land while supporting growth that benefits residents and businesses alike.

D. Objectives and Strategies

This section describes the objectives and strategies that will support the Land Use goals for the Town of Amherst.

OBJECTIVE LU.1 – Preferentially direct future development to existing built-up areas.

The following strategies recommend ways to manage future growth so as to take full advantage of the Town’s existing infrastructure, and reduce sprawl.

STRATEGIES

LU.1.A Inventory and identify existing developed areas that are appropriate for density increases and redevelopment.

Certain portions of the downtown, village centers, and specific districts and neighborhoods may be appropriate for higher densities of development. The Town should update its regulatory code to ensure that such development is permitted and encouraged, particularly as infill and redevelopment initiatives are pursued.

LU.1.B Evaluate built-up areas on the basis of their character, quality, and priority, and then identify areas to:

A. Emphasize preservation (historic areas of the downtown, village centers, and other specific districts and residential neighborhoods - key resource areas).

B. Emphasize adaptive reuse (particularly high quality historic areas of the downtown).

C. Allow a varying combination of preservation and redevelopment (other village centers, transitional or neighborhood business areas).

D. Allow more extensive development and redevelopment with a balance of incentives and controls (highway commercial corridors, research parks, etc.).

E. Encourage denser development of appropriate scale and design (village centers and downtown).

The Town should create a refined conceptual development framework that focuses most new development and infill on its existing built-up areas, including downtown, village centers, and specific districts and neighborhoods. Depending on the character and historic quality of particular areas, the Town can emphasize different approaches in terms of preservation, adaptive reuse, infill, and redevelopment strategies.

New zoning, development/design regulations, and density incentives must take into account the potential impacts of strong student housing pressures, including the issue of absentee landlords. In campus-edge neighborhoods in particular, new regulations should be undertaken in tandem with other regulatory or program efforts. These could include strengthening code inspections, revising existing rental registration regulations, and encouraging alternative student housing efforts (see H.7.B, H.8, and S.3.F).

LU.1.C Use flexible zoning techniques, such as form-based codes, to promote mixed-use development.

Rather than focusing on the separation of land uses, form-based codes guide the creation of healthy mixed-use communities where building form, public space, and streetscape design take top priority. (See sidebar at left.) Unlike typical zoning practices, form-based ordinances allow the community to specify the various "types" of

Form-based Codes

Form-based codes supplement the conventional zoning approach of segregating and regulating land use types by focusing on the desired form (design) of an area once its development is complete, and creating regulations to guide new development toward that desired end result.

The design outcomes for specific areas are identified through a design-focused public participation process. Form-based zoning regulations create "regulating plans" tailored to specific areas and can be effective in helping to create vital, mixed-use areas.

buildings, streets, and open spaces that will be featured in the plan. The objective is to create a setting that accommodates diverse uses over time, but is highly specific in terms of physical form. Using tools such as form-based codes, Amherst can increase the flexibility of development regulations, promote a mix of uses, and ensure that its desired character is retained.

LU.1.D Undertake rezoning efforts that direct more intensive development to appropriate areas and limit development in key resource areas.

The Town should engage in a comprehensive review and update of its zoning bylaw and map to ensure that the regulations reflect the community's vision for future development, as captured in the land use principles that preface this chapter. Permitted densities may need to be increased in built-up areas like village centers, and reduced in key resource areas or in agricultural zones.

LU.1.E Revise existing zoning to encourage and include incentives for well-designed, energy-efficient infill/redevelopment projects.

Incentives such as density bonuses and more flexible dimensional regulations should be available for infill and redevelopment projects that demonstrate specific characteristics of high quality, sustainable design.

Infill and redevelopment projects provide many benefits to the community, but can often cost more when considering the expense of cleaning up a polluted brownfield site (see LU.5.F) or redeveloping and adaptively reusing an historic structure. Accommodating parking needs is also a big hurdle to overcome in infill and redevelopment projects. Incentives that promote infill and redevelopment while protecting existing historic character and protecting residential neighborhoods should be built into the development standards. Specifically, minimum lot sizes for residential districts and parking standards for all districts should be re-evaluated.

The Town should also develop incentives to encourage energy-efficient development. For example, density bonuses could be offered to development projects that are LEED-certified and/or which meet other appropriate standards. (LEED is one national benchmark for green

building established by the US Green Building Council – see <http://www.usgbc.org/> for more information.)

LU.1.F Establish programs to encourage economic development in existing developed areas (e.g., Economic Opportunity Area (EOA) type programs).

Economic development can be encouraged in predetermined areas through the creation of additional Economic Opportunity Areas. These EOAs should already have sewer, water and other necessary utilities, except where it serves the community's interests to extend those services. By encouraging infill and redevelopment, the need for additional infrastructure investments can be minimized; therefore, developments within the area will help the region and the community economize on utility infrastructure.

LU.1.G Reduce energy use by encouraging new residences near supporting goods and services and transit.

A better integration of land uses can help to reduce the need for car travel. When residences are in close proximity to shopping, services, jobs, parks, public transit facilities, and other public amenities, residents spend less time driving and consume fewer energy resources. Energy consumption is further reduced when streets are designed to be more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly.

LU.1.H Create mechanisms for transfers of development rights (TDRs) from key resource areas and agricultural lands to village centers, downtown, and other specific districts and neighborhoods where denser development is more appropriate.

Property ownership can be described as a bundle of specific rights to use and control land (including mineral rights, timber rights, air rights, development rights, etc.), which the government can constrain to varying degrees. In a transfer of development rights, the right to develop a parcel of land is severed from the land itself, and can be bought, sold, and transferred elsewhere. The original land is subsequently protected from development, the property owners are paid the value of the development rights, and developers who purchase those rights can move them and use them to build at

higher densities in a different location, where such density is desired and appropriate. Amherst should explore the implementation of a TDR program in order to manage future growth.

OBJECTIVE LU.2 - Create vital downtown and village centers (areas of mixed-use, including retail, commercial, and residential elements) that are walkable, attractive and efficient.

Through infrastructure investment, incentives, and improved regulations, the Town should foster increased economic, cultural and social activity in the downtown and outlying village centers by encouraging a variety of mixed-uses including live-work units. These areas should foster interactions through attractive public spaces and the creation of a walkable environment.

STRATEGIES

LU.2.A Change zoning to allow denser residential occupancy near existing services and public transit.

Residential development near or in combination with shops, services, and public transit can greatly contribute to a more vital community, particularly when streetscapes are designed to promote walking and biking. Such development can reduce energy consumption, help build a sense of community, and improve community health overall. Residents are more likely to interact on the street and enjoy public spaces when they can walk or bicycle to many of their daily destinations.

LU.2.B Encourage increased upper floor residential development in downtown and village centers to support a vital economic and social setting.

The Town should review and update its development ordinances to encourage additional upper floor residential development in the downtown and village centers.

LU.2.C Support the development of live/work spaces (e.g. artists' lofts, high tech small business offices).

Live-work units may take variable forms including renovated lofts and mixed-use townhouses. This type of housing encourages adaptive reuse of older buildings, leads to lower car emissions for workers who no longer need to

commute, reduces start-up costs for small businesses, and can help revitalize local economies. The Town should encourage the development of live/work spaces throughout the Amherst community. For more information on the subject see the Live Work Network at <http://www.liveworknet.com>.

LU.2.D Build a permanent farmer’s market facility.

Developing a facility in which Amherst’s current seasonal farmer’s market could operate year-round in downtown Amherst could benefit the community in a variety of ways. It can help support the economic viability and sustainability of local agriculture, serve as a community gathering place, and provide a new attraction to draw visitors from the broader region.

LU.2.E Develop more public art in downtown and village centers.

Public art helps celebrate and enhance the unique character of Amherst’s downtown and village centers. The Public Arts Commission could involve the Amherst community in a public process to identify additional locations where they would like to see public art installations, host design competitions, recruit artists to contribute more public art to the community on a permanent or temporary basis, and seek to establish mechanisms for funding ongoing maintenance of permanent public artworks.

LU.2.F Use downtown green spaces more intensively, adding play spaces to encourage people of all ages to congregate.

Public green spaces are significant assets to urban areas, particularly when they are well-loved and frequently used by community members. Amherst should examine whether additional amenities, activities, or events could be provided in order to enhance the use of downtown green spaces by all members of the community.

LU.2.G Create music/dance/meeting venues downtown.

Entertainment venues such as music venues, nightclubs, theaters, and restaurants can greatly increase the

vibrancy in the downtown by attracting visitors and creating downtown activity well beyond working hours.

LU.2.H Promote sustainable tourism in Amherst.

The Amherst community should examine opportunities for increasing sustainable levels of tourism in town. New marketing initiatives that highlight key attractions or offer “visitor’s packages” can help attract more tourists, contribute to the local economy, and invigorate the downtown area. The character of new tourism marketing initiatives should be evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure that the levels of public use of Amherst’s tourism resources remain sustainable over time, avoiding damage or degradation of those resources or the community’s overall quality of life.

OBJECTIVE LU.3 - Preserve key undeveloped lands

The Amherst community places a high value on its unique landscapes and natural resources. The following strategies recommend ways to identify, evaluate and preserve the Town’s most critical natural resources.

STRATEGIES

LU.3.A Update inventories of key natural resources in Amherst and publish the results.

The Amherst community should develop an updated inventory of key natural resource areas using data and input from the Town, conservation organizations, and landowners.

LU.3.B Evaluate resource lands on the basis of environmental quality, risk, and connectivity.

Once a natural resources inventory is completed, each parcel should be assessed for its value based on designated criteria of environmental quality, relative risk of loss or degradation, and connectivity, and priorities should be set for future conservation efforts.

LU.3.C Identify areas to preserve, areas where a varying combination of preservation and development should occur, and areas to allow development with only modest controls.

Once conservation priorities have been set, the Amherst community should determine how to manage the remaining inventory of natural landscapes. Certain areas may be deemed appropriate for future development, while other areas may be appropriate for more limited development. Regulations can be established to ensure that the most significant natural resources and environmental features on a given site are preserved.

LU.3.D Purchase the most critical natural resource properties.

The Town and local conservation organizations should continue to work together to purchase those properties that represent Amherst’s highest conservation priorities.

LU.3.E Revise growth management regulations—zoning, subdivision regulations, health regulations, etc.—to protect environmental resources and scenic viewsheds.

The Town should comprehensively review and revise its zoning and subdivision ordinances to ensure that growth management regulations are aligned with growth needs and land preservation priorities. Regulations should seek to preserve the environmental and scenic value of Amherst’s significant rural landscapes.

LU.3.F Revise zoning overlay districts for aquifer, watershed, and farmland resources. Create a zoning overlay district for critical forest resource areas.

Overlay districts can be used to help conserve a variety of vulnerable natural resources, including aquifers, wetlands, and forest resources. Overlay zones further refine underlying zoning (through buffers, setbacks, clustering requirements, etc.) in order to protect these resources. The Town should revise existing overlay districts and develop new overlay districts to ensure that the community’s regulatory code is in line with its environmental protection priorities.

OBJECTIVE LU.4 - Protect key farmland and farming in Amherst.

The following strategies describe ways to maintain the viability of Amherst’s agricultural community through updates to land use regulations.

STRATEGIES

LU.4.A Provide incentives to encourage sustainable/green farming and forestry practices.

Encouraging sustainable agriculture and forestry can preserve the fertility of the soil over generations, contribute to a sound local economy, and create positive impacts on the community and the region.

The Amherst community should identify and implement incentives to encourage the use of farming practices that conserve and protect the water supply, retain wildlife habitats, and maintain high soil quality. Land use regulations can help to play a role in promoting these sustainable practices.

Amherst should consider providing financial incentives (preferential tax assessments, rebates, etc.) to property owners who can demonstrate that they consistently use and harvest land resources in sustainable ways.

LU.4.B Revise and expand farming overlay districts, and create new forestry districts.

Current farmland conservation overlay zoning districts regulate new residential development in critical farmland areas in order to preserve agricultural land uses, protect prime soils, and prevent other uses from negatively impacting farming activities. This zoning limits the amount of new development that can take place on the land, and maximizes the amount of protected ‘common land’ that must be permanently set aside when development occurs. Similar forest lands overlay district protections should be considered.

The Planning Board should work with the Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission, Tree Warden, and Public Shade Tree Committee to revise existing regulations, create new overlay districts, expand existing districts, and continue to explore ways to refine and expand resource protection zoning.

LU.4.C Create regulations that protect and support farmers' interests.

Barriers such as costly permits, lengthy approval processes, zoning restrictions, and legal disputes can limit a farm's business options and hinder profitability. The Town should update its ordinances in order to remove these barriers and enhance agricultural sustainability. It can eliminate policies that impede farming interests, such as restrictions on accessory farm businesses. Through the Right to Farm bylaw, the Town can encourage the incorporation of nuisance disclaimers into sales contracts for non-agricultural development within agricultural zones, in order to reduce conflict and litigation between farmers and neighboring residential communities.

LU.4.D Continue to acquire APRs (agricultural preservation restrictions), and buy development rights on critical farmland.

Agricultural preservation restrictions (APRs) are voluntary programs that offer owners of "prime" and "state important" agricultural lands an alternative to selling their land for development purposes. The APR program pays farmers the difference between the fair market value and agricultural value of their land in exchange for permanent deed restrictions. These deed restrictions preclude any development that would have a negative impact on the land's agricultural viability. The community should seek to promote additional APRs in the Amherst region.

OBJECTIVE LU.5 – Identify key locations for business development and adopt land use regulations that can help broaden the Town's business tax base while avoiding inappropriate businesses, big boxes, heavy industry, etc.

The Amherst community has a clear sense of the types of businesses and industries that it would like to attract to the community. The Economic Development chapter of this plan highlights a number of strategies for encouraging the growth of target industries. This objective and accompanying strategies look at the role that land use regulations can play in enabling future economic growth.

STRATEGIES**LU.5.A Identify and inventory areas suitable for different kinds of commercial development in Amherst.**

The community should develop an inventory of the lands most suitable for targeted economic development in Amherst. This may include small lots for retail and mixed-use development in the downtown and village centers, or larger lots in selected outlying areas appropriate for research and technology firms or light industry.

LU.5.B Amend the zoning regulations to encourage business development in appropriate undeveloped and under-developed areas.

Increasing permitted business densities in appropriate, strategic locations where existing natural resources are not of high quality or of critical importance can help to limit sprawl and reduce development pressure on critical rural lands. In areas targeted by the community as appropriate for future development, zoning amendments should be pursued to allow for higher densities.

LU.5.C Encourage commercial and mixed-use development in downtown and village center business districts.

In order to reduce development pressures on scenic rural landscapes, the Town should create a favorable regulatory environment that removes obstacles and provides incentives for compact, well-designed development in the downtown and village centers.

LU.5.D Revise and expand zoning districts to accommodate clean, sustainable industry.

Certain categories of industry are desirable for Amherst because they can bring skilled, well-paid, high-demand jobs to the community and enhance and diversify the economic tax base. Zoning districts should be expanded and/or new districts created to facilitate this type of economic development.

LU.5.E Identify and inventory existing and potential areas appropriate or already zoned for the development of business parks, then extend or

improve the infrastructure necessary to make these parks viable.

Provide existing and potential new business parks with necessary infrastructure in appropriate areas for clean businesses, research companies, professional offices, information- or technology-based firms and other appropriate business uses.

LU.5.F Inventory areas needing environmental clean-up, including known brown-fields sites, and assess their suitability as sites for commercial or mixed-use development.

Brownfields are abandoned or underutilized properties that have real or perceived environmental contamination that constrains redevelopment potential. While federal funding and tax incentives are available to address these problems, municipalities often must take the lead in guiding the clean up and redevelopment of these sites. The Town should inventory its brownfield sites, prioritize the clean-up of those areas that are suitable for commercial or mixed-use redevelopment, and seek resources for undertaking rehabilitation and development of these sites.

LU.5.G Consider outright Town purchase of the most critical properties to spur appropriate development and redevelopment. Then use public ownership as a development incentive, as well as a control.

Once an inventory has been completed, the community should consider whether any of the lands targeted for economic growth are in need of special attention in order to attract private investment and appropriate development. In some cases the Town may need to purchase the properties outright, or obtain development rights or easements for critical areas.

Amherst has a long history of obtaining property rights—particularly APRs and conservation easements—in order to protect critical resources and slow or control growth in specific areas of Town. Public ownership of land can also be used as an active incentive where development is desired—it allows the community to reduce land costs for development, offering transfer of a property to a developer at a very low cost in exchange for the developer providing public amenities. Ownership allows the

community full control over the nature and design of the resulting development.

LU.5.H Organize and coordinate administrative procedures to ensure that the permit process itself does not represent an unreasonable impediment to desired development.

Having identified the kinds of business development it desires, the Town should encourage their development. The permitting process should be expedited for these businesses by implementing coordinated review procedures for development plans, while continuing to ensure that such companies protect the health and welfare of local populations and ecologies, and respect historic character.

OBJECTIVE LU.6 - Guide new housing growth so as to minimize impact on Amherst's open space and small-town rural character.

Any new growth in Amherst should be designed to protect the Town's natural resources and preserve its existing character. The following strategies recommend how development and design regulations could be used to ensure that future growth is in accordance with the Town's land use principles and harmonious in terms of design.

STRATEGIES

LU.6.A Revise growth management regulations— zoning, subdivision regulations, health regulations, etc.

These regulations can be used to protect environmental resources and preserve scenic viewsheds and to help determine the nature, location, and design of future housing development. Zoning and subdivision ordinances should be updated to reflect the Town's vision for future growth and development. Health regulations can be developed to better govern private septic and well systems, which are required for residential development in some of the Town's remaining undeveloped outlying areas beyond the reach of our public sewer/water systems.

LU.6.B Increase density of residential units in specified areas when strict design and planning guidelines are met.

Amherst can develop incentives to encourage developers to adhere to planning and design guidelines. Density bonuses and dimensional flexibility are ways to encourage development located in appropriate areas and that meets desired planning and design standards.

OBJECTIVE LU.7 – Identify appropriate locations for future municipal recreation facilities.

Certain lands owned by the Town of Amherst may be suitable for providing additional recreation amenities in the community, such as parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, passive recreation lawns, and natural areas.

STRATEGIES

LU.7.A Inventory and evaluate Town-owned lands that are not dedicated or restricted to an exclusive public use.

Town-owned parcels that are currently vacant should be inventoried and evaluated to determine if they are suitable for the development of new recreation opportunities. Criteria used in the evaluation may include the land’s accessibility, population served, environmental constraints, and potential for filling specific recreation gaps, among others.

LU.7.B Identify appropriate locations for new recreation to occur in concert with planned new conservation, school, fire department, public works, and/or other planned municipal facilities.

For each new Town project or facility, the recreational needs of the neighborhood and community as a whole should be considered as a potential shared use. See LU.8.A.

LU.7.C Begin multi-year design and capital budget planning for new recreation facilities.

Following completion of the evaluations above (LU.7.A, LU.7.B), the community should target and pursue

the most appropriate lands for additional development of recreation facilities.

OBJECTIVE LU.8 - Create a process, committee, and/or administrative mechanism for sorting out competing interests on individual properties.

From time to time, different interest groups – such as the Town, residents, property owners, colleges, University, and developers – may need to negotiate competing interests on a particular piece of land. The following strategies suggest approaches for reconciling these different interests regarding land use regulations and development options.

STRATEGIES

LU.8.A Develop an administrative land use review process for all Town projects.

The Town should take the lead in demonstrating how to coordinate the community’s diverse interests in the development or redevelopment of public land by imposing on itself a mandatory process to mediate, prioritize, and coordinate competing proposals for various municipal land parcels for proposed new Town projects. This internal review process should involve all of the appropriate Town departments and boards/committees representing major public interests. Every proposed use of an existing or proposed new public property should be reviewed for the full range of potential public uses and interests (conservation, housing, recreation, historic preservation, infrastructure, etc.), and multiple joint uses of property should be encouraged wherever feasible.

LU.8.B Revise the community’s development regulations to more fully incorporate diverse public interests.

Zoning, subdivision regulation and other development regulations are intended to represent and protect both the public and private interests in the rational and orderly development of land. These regulations should be revised to ensure that multiple public interests are better represented in and provided for through new private development.

LU.8.C. Require community charrettes as part of the permitting process, to encourage public participation in design.

For development projects above certain thresholds of scale or impact, charrettes could be a required step in the permit process. Community charrettes are an excellent tool for integrating public input into the design process. Through a series of public meetings, design workshops, and open houses, stakeholders and the public can engage in an interactive approach to creating development principles and an illustrated vision for a particular piece of land. Charrettes result in design solutions that effectively negotiate a variety of competing community interests.

LU.8.D Educate the public about land use regulation (zoning).

Public education will be a key component to updating Amherst’s land use (zoning) regulations and engaging in future design and planning initiatives. Coordinated efforts by the Planning Board and other Town committees, will foster a broader understanding of the rationale behind new zoning amendments, including how such revisions reflect the community’s land use principles.

OBJECTIVE LU.9 - Honor the historic/cultural character and beauty of neighborhoods.

The Amherst community should undertake a variety of efforts to preserve the historic character of its neighborhoods. Historical information and design standards can play a significant role in ensuring that new development, redevelopment, and infill projects will retain the desired character of the community.

STRATEGIES

LU.9.A Identify design standards that will preserve existing town character, and develop an enhanced design review process.

Design standards are important when considering the character of the downtown and village centers. Amherst has had an advisory design review process in place since October 1983. Standards should be developed that capture the existing character of these areas and require future buildings to reflect a similar character in terms of height,

bulk, relationship to the streetscape, and appropriate architectural styles and building materials. The Design Review Board could serve an important role in reviewing and advising on potential development options in areas outside of its current downtown jurisdiction. Form-based codes can also be used to ensure that future development adheres to desired community characteristics.

LU.9.B Create neighborhood design standards.

Design can serve to preserve historic small-town character, ensure that new development complements historic buildings, and create an accessible, pedestrian-friendly environment. In addition to addressing fundamental issues such as building height, width, and setbacks, design guidelines can also focus on elements such as signage, materials selection, streetscape improvements, and landscaping.

Specific standards should be developed to encourage new development and neighborhood infill development that reflects and enhances existing neighborhood character. These standards should be made a part of the Town's development regulations, and incorporated into each of the residential zoning designations. Special neighborhood overlay districts can also be considered to preserve and promote the design qualities unique to specific neighborhoods.

LU.9.C Identify design standards that minimize environmental and visual impacts in natural areas, and amend design regulations to incorporate those standards.

The Amherst community should identify specific design standards that would best guide development occurring on or adjacent to scenic landscapes, and incorporate these principles into existing development permit regulations. Design elements may address issues of siting, height, bulk, required setbacks, and appropriate building materials, among others. A design review process can also be created to ensure that new development does not detract from Amherst's scenic resources.

LU.9.D Promote the use of buffer zones to minimize the impact of new buildings on nearby key resources.

Buffer zones can be designed to limit potentially negative visual, auditory, and ecological impacts of development. The Amherst community should work to identify the minimum size and design requirements for buffer zones surrounding important natural features such as watersheds, habitats, scenic landscapes and areas for traditional recreation.

OBJECTIVE LU.10 – Utilize “greenways” and walkways to tie neighborhoods, public spaces, etc, together and make it easier for Amherst residents to walk or bicycle to more destinations.

Greenways are protected corridors of natural green areas, often established along rivers and streams, which can generate numerous benefits for a community. In addition to protecting natural resources and maintaining habitat and wildlife travel corridors, greenways provide opportunities for outdoor recreation. Through the careful planning and installation of trails and bikeways, greenways can provide transportation corridors—a great way for residents and visitors to explore the region, access major recreational areas, and connect community members to nearby shops, jobs, and centers. In these ways, greenways promote healthier lifestyles and a more active community; they also help protect wildlife habitats and environmental resources. Greenways and trails should be an integral component of the community’s transportation system.

STRATEGIES

LU.10.A Create connected, walkable centers and neighborhoods.

The downtown core, village centers, and residential neighborhoods should be designed to appeal to pedestrians and offer a safe, convenient, and attractive network of sidewalks and pathways for traveling from place to place.

LU.10.B Create walkways to connect businesses and residences – create walkways between buildings.

The Town should require new developments to be pedestrian friendly, and to safely connect residents to destinations within a development and to needed goods and services nearby. Sidewalks and pathways should be expanded to create connections between residential areas,

commercial areas, and employment centers. Where feasible, existing informal pedestrian connections across vacant land or through village center alleys should be formalized as public walkways.

LU.10.C Develop a Town-wide plan mapping future greenways, sidewalks, and bike lanes, and amend land use regulations to help implement the plan.

In coordination with the Transportation Plan developed under Strategy T.1.A, the Town should thoroughly review and map potential sites for establishing and extending greenways. Regulations and programs can then be pursued to protect planned greenway lands from future development. Greenways and trails should, where appropriate, effectively connect to the Town's sidewalk and bike lane systems and to public transit stops, all of which can be mapped and planned for in a coordinated fashion. Provisions can be made to ensure that all new developments include sidewalks, bike lanes, and appropriate connections to the greenway system.

LU.10.D Update the subdivision and zoning regulations to require road and pedestrian connections among different neighborhoods, districts, and corridors.

Connectivity is a priority development principle to promote and improve on mobility throughout the community. Development regulations need to reflect this principle, and should require both vehicular and pedestrian connections whenever feasible.

LU.10.E Continue to work with land owners to establish easements for greenways.

As part of its ongoing outreach program regarding the acquisition of open space and trails, the Town should continue to maintain close contact with residents, businesses, farmers, and local governments that own parcels of land which have been targeted for future greenway use. Regular communication should be used to educate landowners about the importance of greenways, offer incentives for the granting of easements, and discuss other ways to protect open space for the public good while respecting private property rights.

E. Land Use Policy Map

The attached Land Use Policy Map represents, in a general manner, the land use development intentions of the community of Amherst as expressed in this Master Plan. This map is consistent with decades of community-based planning expressing the community's preference to preserve and enhance its traditional New England settlement pattern through control of new development.

The majority of new residential and commercial development will be selectively directed into existing built mixed use centers and associated densely-settled neighborhoods. New infill and redevelopment in existing historic downtowns, village centers, and established neighborhoods will have to abide by rigorous and sensitive design and density controls intended to preserve and enhance existing character. Existing outlying farmlands, riparian (stream-related) corridors, and woodlands are predominantly shown on the Map as permanently preserved lands or as lands targeted for potential preservation or for carefully-limited development. Some selected outlying areas—usually but not always near existing or proposed new centers—would be targeted for carefully controlled non-residential commercial development.

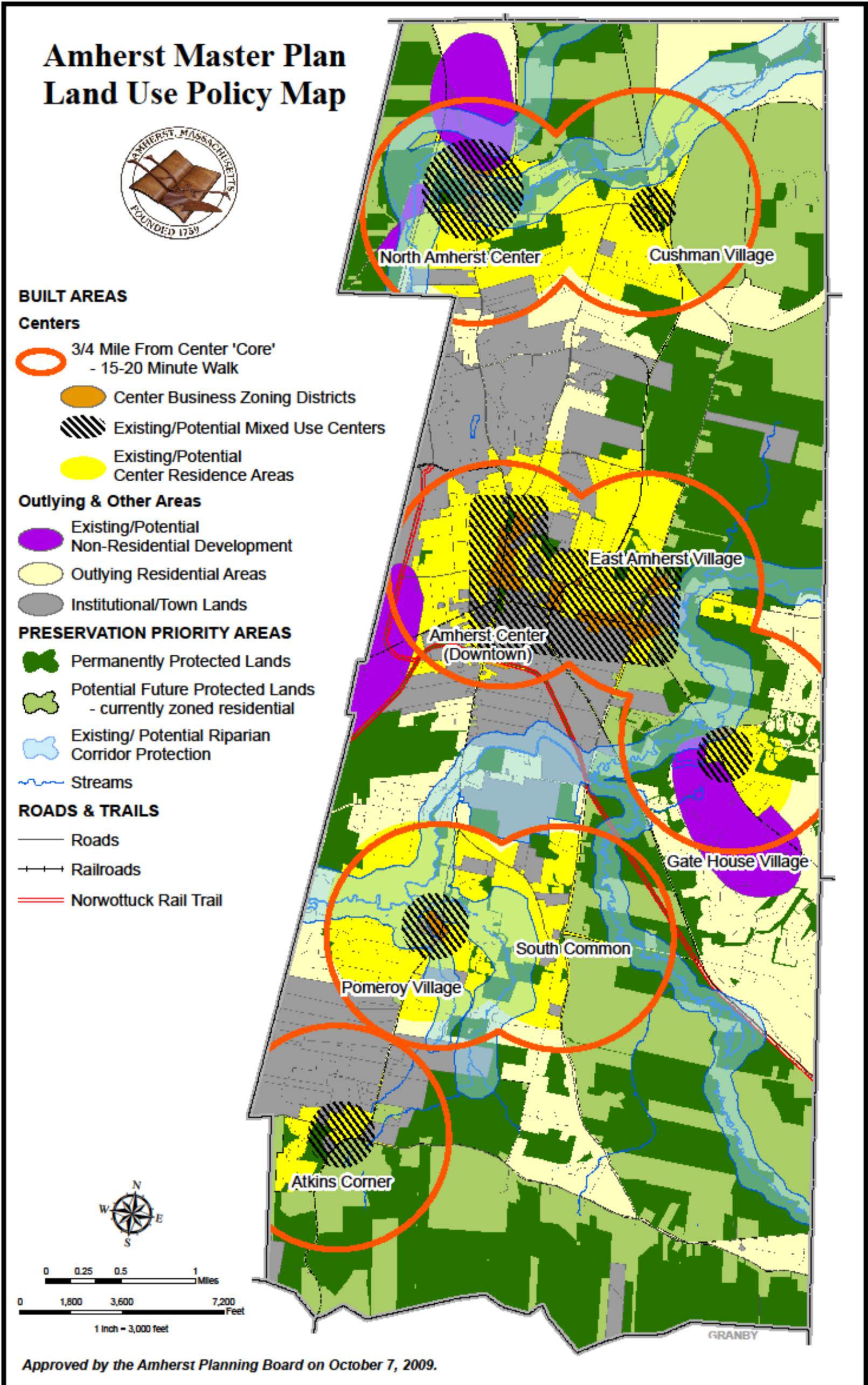
Areas designated as “centers” on the Land Use Policy Map are deliberately broad and generalized, and include the existing mixed-use downtown and village centers, the densely settled residential neighborhoods associated with and surrounding those centers, and other adjacent areas within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile (approximately 15-20 minutes walking time) of the geographic center of existing or proposed centers. These areas also include potential new centers and neighborhoods. Areas within these “centers” should not be understood as automatically representing areas targeted for new or infill development—as shown, for instance, they also include areas already preserved or slated for potential future preservation.

Amherst has yet to complete a center-by-center and neighborhood-by-neighborhood geographic planning process to create new zoning districts and

new development regulations for those areas. Accordingly, the “centers” shown on the Land Use Policy Map are meant only to indicate their general existing or potential location. Likewise, areas shown for potential future non-residential development or preservation are not unequivocal statements of future community intent. In many places, areas of potential development and preservation overlap, indicating where the community has expressed an interest in both, but has not yet resolved how to balance those interests.

Following the completion of the geographic planning and rezoning process called for in this Plan, development regulations will change, and some of the areas designated for development will be developed and others designated for preservation will be preserved. Others will experience compromise solutions. Some will not change at all. The Land Use Policy Map does not represent community decisions on these questions. It only indicates where the community has expressed specific strong interests for preservation and/or development, and, in the process, identifies those areas where the community will need to coordinate and reconcile its sometimes competing interests.

Land Use Policy Map



4. Demographics and Housing



Master Plan

Relevant plans and policy documents:

- *Affordable Housing Plan [2008 update]*

A. Goal

A mix of housing that meets the physical needs of and is affordable to the broadest possible spectrum of our community, and that minimizes the impact on the environment.

B. Overview

The presence of higher education institutions in Amherst has a significant impact on the character of the Town’s population, as well as its housing needs. The Town has a relatively young, well-educated population, and a relatively high percentage of residents living in multi-family housing or group quarters. Affordability is a concern in Amherst, and as more demands are placed on finite land resources, land prices will continue to rise. A number of themes recur throughout this chapter, including: the desire for more diverse, moderately priced and affordable housing types; the strategic placement of housing near necessary goods and services; the promotion of environmentally-sound housing design; and the desire to create economically diverse neighborhoods that meet the needs of all populations, from students to families to seniors.

In this chapter the concept of affordability is addressed in two different ways. The term “affordable” refers to federal and state definitions of affordable housing (for purposes of housing subsidies) for individuals and households earning up to 80 percent of the median income for this region. However, ensuring a supply of housing that is affordable for middle income households—which do not qualify for state and federal housing programs and subsidies, yet are increasingly finding themselves priced out of the Amherst housing market—is also a concern. The term “moderately priced housing” refers to housing accessible to such middle-income households.

C. Existing Conditions

This section summarizes key points related to current demographics and housing:

Population growth trends: Amherst’s population grew at a remarkable pace from 1940 to 1980, increasing five-fold from 6,410 to 33,229 residents. Growth continued in the 1980s at a much slower pace. Between 1990 and 2008, the population increased only slightly from 35,228 to 35,962, an increase of only 734 persons, or about 2 percent.

Influence of higher education on demographics: Amherst’s population growth is closely linked to the growth in student enrollment. With over 25,000 students living in Amherst and surrounding communities, the presence of higher education

Note on Census Data:

The population and demographic information provided in this section uses the most recent census data available for Amherst from the 2000 United States Census, as adjusted by a correction in 2008. Other annual census programs such as the American Community Survey (ACS) only focus on geographic areas with a population greater than 65,000, and do not account for residents living in group quarters. Therefore the ACS does not provide reliable data for communities like Amherst, which have significant student populations.

institutions has a significant impact on the town's demographics.

Amherst's population is relatively young, with a median age of 21.8 years in 2000. This is far younger than the median age for the county, state, or nation. The population is also very well-educated, but has a relatively low median income.

Higher education and housing trends: A significant proportion of the town's population (35 percent) lives in group quarters. In comparison, the statewide proportion of residents in group quarters is 3.5 percent. Amherst also has more renter-occupied housing units (59 percent) than owner-occupied units (41 percent). This is the opposite of what is typically found in the county, state, and nation.

Housing unit development outpacing population growth: Despite a relatively static population between 1990 and 2008, the number of housing units in the Town increased by seven percent (610 units) during only the first decade of that period. Among these new units, 50 percent (337 units) were multi-family, (representing a 7.3 percent increase in this type of housing stock). Detached single-family homes accounted for 44 percent of new housing development (an increase of 13.5 percent).

Affordability concerns: Housing in Amherst is more expensive than the average cost of housing in the rest of Hampshire County, costing about nine percent more for rental units and 24 percent more for home prices. About 53 percent of renting households and 18 percent of homeowner households are financially strained by housing costs (meaning they pay over 30 percent of their monthly income on housing costs). Only slightly more than 10 percent (11.2 percent) of Amherst's housing stock is affordable and eligible for listing on the state's Subsidized Housing Inventory. This protects Amherst from Comprehensive Permit applications that could override the community's zoning regulations and allow potentially inappropriate residential development. Maintaining a balance of affordability in Amherst's housing stock represents the community's commitment to economic equity and diversity and ensures local control over new development.

Projected housing needs: Projections of population growth and demographic changes for Amherst vary, but it is clear that the community's housing needs are changing, and local housing policy needs to anticipate and accommodate those changes.

The Objectives and Strategies discussed in the remainder of this chapter provide a coherent framework for meeting Amherst's future housing needs with a focus on creating more diverse, moderately priced and affordable housing options in proximity to goods and services.

D. Objectives and Strategies

This section describes the objectives and strategies that will support the Housing goals for the Town of Amherst.

OBJECTIVE H.1 - Encourage a greater mix of housing types, sizes, and prices serving a wider range of income levels than is currently available throughout Amherst. Encourage the development of economically diverse neighborhoods.

The following strategies recommend ways to diversify housing stock in Amherst, increase housing choice, and establish neighborhoods that bring different groups of people together. Future housing development should strive to meet the needs of all community members, including low- and middle-income households, and should avoid the creation of enclaves of poverty or wealth or uniform concentrations of housing types (single-family, multi-family units, same design/size, etc.) in segregated enclaves. Development incentives, regulations, zoning, and favorable financing are a few of the tools that can be used to spur mixed income, diverse housing development.

STRATEGIES

H.1.A Create more flexible development regulations using a range of prices as the key criterion.

Flexible subdivision regulations and zoning bylaws typically use performance standards encouraging a project to meet certain desirable community criteria, such as preservation of environmentally sensitive areas or provision of affordable housing. In this case, developers who provided for and formalized a range of housing prices that included affordable and/or moderately priced homes could receive a bonus in the number of homes permitted in the project. These regulations or bylaws could also provide developers who meet the standards with the additional incentive of greater flexibility in site planning.

H.1.B Base the density of building units within a development on a formula for the total allowable square footage for all units combined, rather than a total unit count, with the goal of seeing a greater number of smaller units instead of fewer larger homes.

The community should support the development of smaller housing units in the interest of diversifying Amherst's housing stock. Current zoning looks only at the total number of homes possible on a given property, rather than the size of those individual homes. One way to encourage smaller homes is to permit more homes to be developed on a single site, provided that the combined square footage of all homes is no greater than would be the case with fewer large homes. Market forces would favor the creation of

more saleable units. Smaller homes will help the community ensure more diversity in housing size and affordability, while also helping to meet its energy goals.

H.1.C Use dimensional regulations to encourage the construction of smaller homes and smaller lots.

Higher-density small lot developments have lower infrastructure costs per unit. Smaller homes also tend to have lower materials cost, greater affordability, and a smaller environmental impact. Amherst's current dimensional requirements date from the 1970s. An examination of the existing lot and house size distribution in historic neighborhoods could allow revised regulations to both honor historic patterns and meet modern needs.

H.1.D Develop design guidelines for multi-family dwellings, such as town houses and duplexes, integrated into the context of existing neighborhoods.

With the proper design standards in place, multi-family dwellings can increase community acceptance of a diversity of housing types. Design standards can be used to guide the development of multi-family dwellings so that they reflect the character of the neighborhood and will be more easily accepted by neighboring residents.

H.1.E Revise zoning regulations to make it easier to create attached and detached accessory apartments and duplexes out of existing owner-occupied housing stock in all residential zoning districts.

Creative zoning techniques can be utilized to maximize the housing stock available, including more moderately priced housing types. Accessory apartments and duplexes can take a variety of physical forms and offer many benefits, providing rental income for homeowners, enhancing moderately priced options within the housing market, and increasing dwelling densities while maintaining neighborhood character. Efforts must be made to address the fears of neighborhood residents regarding the effects of student residents living in these units.

H.1.F Allow two-family houses by right in all residential zoning districts.

In order to diversify housing stock, the Town should permit the development of two-family homes by-right with appropriate conditions in all residential areas. Two-family homes typically lead to cost savings for developers and buyers. Design and landscape standards should be used to ensure that two-family homes reflect the character of the neighborhood and will be more easily accepted by neighboring residents.

H.1.G Reduce or eliminate lot size requirement differences for one- and two-family homes.

Current zoning requires two-family homes to be situated on larger lots than single-family homes. This limits development opportunities for duplexes, and leads to a less efficient use of land. With proper design standards in place, two-family housing can be effectively integrated into any single-family neighborhood, without the need for significantly larger lots.

OBJECTIVE H.2 - Preserve and expand the number of affordable and moderately priced rental units and housing stock.

Along with the creation of new affordable and moderately priced housing units, the preservation of existing affordable housing stock is critical to the success of an affordable housing plan. The following strategies recommend ways to preserve and expand affordable housing options in Amherst.

STRATEGIES

H.2.A Increase the percentage of affordable and/or moderately priced units required in new developments.

The Town of Amherst should assess its affordable housing needs and future growth projections, and develop appropriate amendments to the existing inclusionary zoning housing requirements to meet those needs. For example, working with developers and housing advocates, the community could explore increasing the currently required percentage of affordable units for all new housing developments greater than 10 units. Additional incentives could also be provided to encourage developers to further increase the percentage of low-income affordable and/or moderate-income affordable workforce housing.

H.2.B Create incentives to make it financially attractive for developers to build affordable and moderately priced units.

The Town of Amherst should offer development incentives to spur the creation of affordable and moderately priced units in larger housing developments. With incentives such as tax breaks or a density bonus, the construction of affordable and moderately priced housing becomes more economically feasible for the developer.

H.2.C Create a formal process for the Amherst Housing Authority and/or the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee to evaluate the potential for a set-aside of land for affordable units when the Town is acquiring conservation or other new land, and when the Town is disposing of Town land.

When the Town of Amherst acquires or sells a parcel of land intended for residential or mixed-use development, it should seek input from local

housing agencies to consider the possibility of a portion of the site being used for affordable and moderately priced housing. See LU.8.A.

H.2.D Develop a fast-track subdivision, site plan, and building permit process for qualified affordable and moderately priced housing developments.

Encourage more diverse housing development by reducing red tape and allowing for more by-right housing options. Deliberate efforts should be made to expedite approval procedures for projects that incorporate a certain percentage of affordable and/or moderately priced units. By streamlining the development process for qualified projects, permitting costs will be lowered and affordable housing supply will be better able to keep up with demand.

H.2.E Waive, reduce and/or rebate fees, including water and sewer connections and permitting fees, for affordable housing units.

Reducing developers' infrastructure fees is another way to reduce construction costs and promote affordable housing development. The Town should consider waiving or reducing standard development fees for residential projects that incorporate a significant percentage of affordable units above and beyond existing requirements.

H.2.F Look for ways to preserve family rental housing options and strategies to preserve affordable and moderately priced units whose affordability restrictions are expiring, including development of funding streams to purchase existing rental housing stock and placing permanent affordability restrictions on these units.

Rental housing can run the risk of either deteriorating or becoming too expensive for low- to middle-income households. Amherst must address these issues in order to preserve its affordable housing stock. The community should work with local housing advocates to develop programs that preserve affordable and moderately priced rental units, particularly larger units that are appropriate for families.

H.2.G Expand on the current practice of acquiring Affordable Housing Restrictions (AHRs—similar to APRs) through purchase or donation of a deed restriction on a housing unit so that it becomes permanently affordable.

Massachusetts law already recognizes (and Amherst has already obtained) AHRs. These are deed restrictions which permanently limit the resale value of a residential home and keep it affordable. The Town of Amherst should continue to aggressively pursue and expand on this practice.

H.2.H Provide financial assistance to facilitate and expand home ownership for low- and moderate-income households, including first time home-buyers.

Currently, the Town of Amherst has Community Preservation Act and Community Development Block Grant funds that can be used to provide mortgage subsidies to eligible households. Funding can be requested on an annual basis from these and other funding sources.

H.2.I Partner with the Amherst Housing Authority, local community development corporations (CDCs), non-profit organizations, and other groups to expand affordable housing in Amherst.

Public-private partnerships are central to affordable housing development. Developers of affordable housing may be not-for-profit community development corporations, faith-based organizations, or even for-profit companies. Successful projects rely upon the availability of favorable funding and financing opportunities, and frequently draw upon resources provided by the federal government, local governments, or philanthropic institutions. The Town should collaborate with local housing development groups to create more affordable and moderately priced rental and ownership housing, including units which can accommodate larger households.

Specifically, Amherst should:

- Work with CDCs to develop new family rental housing with more than 2 bedrooms.
- Work with the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity to encourage the creation of sweat-equity ownership housing for low-income households.
- Work with a housing trust and/or other non-profits to expand funding opportunities for affordable housing.
- Create public/private partnerships with the owners of larger tracts of property willing to invest in limited or mixed development projects that include low-income affordable and moderate-income workforce housing.

H.2.J Lobby the State legislature to create a state-level matching fund program for the purchase of land to be used specifically for low-income affordable and/or moderate-income workforce housing and for increased funding for existing affordable housing programs.

The most significant obstacle to the creation of affordable housing is the cost of land. The state of Massachusetts already provides incentive payments or matching funds to promote certain types of development. For example, towns that adopt Chapter 40R zoning districts to promote smart growth and provide at least 20 percent affordable housing are eligible for

financial incentives ranging from \$10,000 for 20 units to \$600,000 for 501 or more units developed. The Amherst community should lobby the State legislature to develop a similar matching fund/incentive payment program for acquiring (and thereby reducing the cost of) land for affordable housing development.

(See http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/pages/mod-40R.html for more information on Chapter 40R.)

H.2.K Support the development of affordable and moderately priced units that have equity-building provisions.

Equity-building programs should be pursued to help low- and middle-income families become homeowners. Such provisions will help Amherst maintain a strong, economically diverse community in the long-term.

OBJECTIVE H.3 - Increase the opportunity for infill development and the location of housing developments near services.

Appropriately-designed infill development can promote neighborhood revitalization, produce higher densities that lead to a more efficient use of land and infrastructure, and bring residents closer to necessary goods and services. The following strategies suggest ways to promote additional infill development in Amherst.

STRATEGIES

H.3.A Revise the zoning regulations to promote infill development in strategic locations.

Outdated zoning regulations can hinder infill development. The Town should modify zoning district lines and zoning setback/dimensional requirements, and evaluate building form (design) standards to provide for development that diversifies the housing stock while respecting the architectural and landscape character of existing neighborhoods and the community. It should also create a mechanism whereby small infill homes are allowed on some lots in exchange for an affordable housing deed restriction.

H.3.B Increase residential densities in the downtown and village centers.

The zoning for the downtown and village centers should be revised to allow for more downtown housing and higher residential densities. By increasing relative densities and allowing small businesses and residences to coexist, the Town can create more walkable neighborhoods that provide residents easy access to jobs, goods, services, and public transit. Intensified residential development above ground-floor shops and restaurants can help to create a more vibrant downtown community. An integrated mix of uses

coupled with a pedestrian-friendly environment can also generate positive impacts in terms of reducing traffic, commute times, and energy consumption.

The community should:

- Intensify upper story housing development by revising zoning to eliminate unit count and total residential area limitations.
- Rezone Limited Business (B-L) areas near downtown to General Business (B-G) or another appropriate district to make it easier to create multi-family residential units and residential units in conjunction with businesses.

H.3.C Revise zoning regulations to encourage mixed-use, multi-family development projects.

The Town’s zoning regulations should be revised to remove impediments to building mixed-use or multi-family development projects. Such development should be permitted by right in targeted areas. Attention to design and the adoption of design standards (See LU.1.C and LU.9) can ensure that new development fits the desired scale and character of the community.

H.3.D Address the impacts of the student housing market in any revisions of zoning and other regulations.

New zoning, development/design regulations, and density incentives must take into account the potential impacts of strong student housing pressures, including the issues which arise as a result of absentee landlords. In campus-edge neighborhoods in particular, new regulations should be undertaken in tandem with other regulatory or program efforts. These should include:

- a. Increasing the capacity for code inspections and enforcement (see H.8 and S.3.F);
- b. Reevaluating, clarifying, and strengthening existing zoning and rental registration regulations (see LU.1.B, LU.9 and H.7.B);
- c. Encouraging the provision of alternative student housing (see E.4.E and H.7) , and;
- d. Working with the colleges and University to address student behavior (see S.3.G and S.7.D).

OBJECTIVE H.4 - Encourage the production of housing in an environmentally sound manner with respect to design, siting, materials and resource use.

New housing development provides the opportunity to promote environmentally friendly design. The following strategies suggest ways to promote the growth of “green” housing in Amherst.

STRATEGIES

H.4.A. Modify Amherst’s cluster development zoning regulations to require higher-density clustering of housing in the more rural parts of Town to achieve a smaller development footprint and greater retention of open space.

Greater density on the developed part of the land allows more common and open space to be retained. A revised development calculation could allow for a few more units, but less overall impact due to a significantly more compact development footprint.

H.4.B Adopt Low Impact Development standards for all new residential developments.

Low Impact Development (LID) represents a sustainable storm-water management strategy that uses appropriate site design techniques in order to protect environmental resources. The Town of Amherst should consider requiring LID standards in all new residential development. More information is available at www.lowimpactdevelopment.org.

H.4.C Provide incentives for developments that meet energy efficiency standards in new buildings.

Incentives such as tax rebates on costs related to making buildings energy-efficient can encourage developers to build more environmentally sustainable buildings, which benefit the environment and the general health of the community. See LU.1.E and NC.4.A.

OBJECTIVE H.5 - Encourage housing that meets the needs of special populations.

Housing options in Amherst should meet the needs of all residents, regardless of age or ability. Development of incentives, regulations, zoning, and favorable financing are a few of the tools that can be used to spur housing development that meets the needs of special populations.

STRATEGIES

H.5.A Encourage the production of affordable units for seniors.

Nationwide, an aging population is creating an increased need for housing for seniors. Eighty-two million Baby Boomers are moving to the empty-nest stage of life and are looking for more compact housing types. Amherst should take steps now to promote the development of smaller, affordable housing options that will be appropriate for a growing senior population and allow its residents to “age in place.” This could be accomplished using the same zoning mechanisms proposed herein that are intended to create smaller housing options and more accessible housing.

H.5.B Encourage the production of assisted living units for seniors that will also include affordable units.

The Town of Amherst should encourage the development of affordable assisted living units in the community. The Town should partner with social service organizations and developers of assisted living facilities to identify potential sites for this type of development. The zoning code should also be revised to remove any impediments to this type of development.

H.5.C Develop incentives for developers to build accessible units.

Incentives such as tax rebates on costs associated with making the units accessible can encourage developers to improve accessibility and create housing for residents with special needs. Such incentives can offset the developer’s additional design and construction costs.

H.5.D Provide incentives to developers to encourage “visitability” throughout housing developments where accessible units are built.

The Town should provide incentives for universal accessibility in design, on the basis that not only the accessible units occupied by disabled citizens need to be accessible, but that disabled residents should be able to visit their able-bodied neighbors without having to face obstacles such as stairs, etc.

H.5.E Promote development of diverse kinds of retirement housing that produce property tax revenue exceeding the cost of municipal services to such developments.

Actively promote Amherst’s growing reputation as a highly desirable retirement community by providing a variety of housing opportunities that appeal to the growing number of Baby Boomers now reaching retirement age.

OBJECTIVE H.6 Improve housing and services for people in the area who are homeless.

The following strategies address the needs of Amherst’s homeless population, as well as those at risk of becoming homeless.

STRATEGIES

H.6.A Study the need for housing and support services for homeless persons in Amherst.

Study the size and character of Amherst’s homeless population with a view to possibly develop local or regional private/public mechanisms for providing needed housing and support services.

H.6.B Work with regional efforts currently underway to address homelessness.

There is a Western Massachusetts Homelessness Task Force currently working on a set of initiatives to address homelessness in the region. Amherst should participate in and support this regional initiative.

H.6.C Support and broaden the base of providers of services within the Town. Improve access to services elsewhere in the region.

Local agencies are currently providing food, clothing, and a safe community for the homeless in Amherst. There is currently an absence of case managers to assist residents who are on the verge of falling into homelessness. There is also an absence of case managers to assist the homeless in finding needed services, such as counseling, drug treatment and job training.

H.6.D Increase the amount of housing available to people of very low incomes.

Currently there are virtually no opportunities for housing within Town for those people with very limited means. A sustained effort should be made to maximize the availability of various forms of housing vouchers and housing programs to create opportunities for this income group.

OBJECTIVE H.7 – Support the creation of taxable student housing that will lessen the pressures on residential neighborhoods.

The large student population places additional pressure on the Amherst housing market. Well-designed and well-located private student housing will lessen the pressure on surrounding neighborhoods.

STRATEGIES

H.7.A Explore the creation of special zoning districts or zoning overlay districts in certain areas suitable for private student housing.

These overlay districts can be designed to incorporate shops, services, and transportation infrastructure to meet the student population’s needs. Districts should be designed to minimize impacts on nearby residential neighborhoods. See also E.4.E.

H.7.B Develop design standards for private student housing zones.

Design standards should be developed for the student housing overlay district to ensure that such development is aligned with existing community character and is compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.

OBJECTIVE H.8 – Build and sustain the Town’s capacity for regulatory oversight for Amherst’s housing stock, and pursue ways to enhance security.

Amherst residents have a right to live in housing that is safe, secure, sanitary, and well-maintained. The community’s ability to ensure this basic right depends on the resources the Town commits to inspection, enforcement and coordination of building, fire, accessibility, and health codes, and to community policing. In a community with extremely low vacancy rates, a young and transient population, and high housing demand, there will always be a temptation for property owners to cut corners, to ignore time-consuming permit procedures, to defer maintenance, and to increase the number of residents or tenants beyond safe levels. Amherst’s ability to ensure building safety code compliance and a basic sense of personal safety and security, especially in large apartment complexes, is a matter of fundamental public safety.

STRATEGIES

H.8.A Fund code inspection departments and programs adequately.

It will not matter how many innovative housing regulations and programs Amherst creates if it does not fund the personnel and resources necessary to enforce those regulations. Appropriate funding for code inspections personnel and programs in all affected Town departments is a critical, base-level investment in the safety and quality of life for Amherst residents.

H.8.B Formalize collaboration between inspecting departments and public safety personnel.

Often the first Town representatives making contact with a property and noticing potential problems are public safety officers (police, fire/EMT) or public infrastructure (DPW) personnel. Existing collaborative arrangements between these departments and code inspectors should be examined, reinforced, and formalized. The potential for integrating public safety/infrastructure reporting with the Town’s permit-tracking system should be explored.

H.8.C Organize and coordinate crime prevention and conflict resolution activity through community policing.

To prevent and reduce criminal activity and anti-social behavior, including gang activity, set up and improve lines of communication between tenants, property managers, and police. Encourage social service agencies to facilitate the development of tenant-run organizations that can organize mutual support systems, ensure access to appropriate social services, organize neighborhood watch groups, and assist in preventing and resolving conflicts. See also S.1.B.

5. Economic Development



Master Plan

A. Goal

To strengthen, diversify and grow the economic base and employment opportunities in the town, through smart development in the downtown, village centers, and commercial zones. Initiatives will be focused on clusters of businesses, mixed services, high technology/clean industries, cultural attractions, education, tourism and agricultural resources. Such development will maintain, improve and sustain quality of life, ecological consciousness and social values.

B. Overview

The presence of institutions of higher education in Amherst has had a significant impact on the economy of the Town. In fact, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst College, and Hampshire College are Amherst's greatest source of employment. These institutions offer stable employment levels and have low turnover. In the past, there have been a limited number of private sector jobs available in Amherst that were not connected to the educational institutions. In the last decade or so, however, there has been a marked increase in the number of small consulting firms and 'hidden tech' businesses using Internet technologies to take advantage of the information resources of Amherst. A number of themes recur throughout this chapter, including: the desire for industrial research parks and encouragement of business development; the improvement and development of the downtown and village centers; the broadening of partnerships with the colleges and University; and the desire to attract, encourage, and retain technological, information-based, and creative businesses within Amherst.

C. Existing Conditions

The University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute has prepared a full assessment of the Town's economic profile and conditions. The complete Existing Conditions and Trends report can be found in Appendix A. This section summarizes the report's key points related to economic development:

Employment is concentrated in educational services:

The employment base of Amherst is stable, but relatively narrow as compared to the rest of the Pioneer Valley and Massachusetts. Employment is concentrated primarily within educational services, including the University of Massachusetts, Hampshire College, and Amherst College. Of the 14,121 jobs in Amherst in 2006, 58.2 percent of them were in educational services. UMass Amherst is

Relevant plans and policy documents:

- ***Atkins Corner Sustainable Development Master Plan – Action Steps for a Better Amherst [November 2000 – February 2002]***
- ***Downtown Action Plan [2002, as augmented by TCRC 2007 review]***
- ***Town Center Streetscape Design Guidelines Manual [2001]***
- ***Overall Economic Development Plan: Five Year Update [1999]***

the second largest employer in western Massachusetts, with about 5,500 employees—over 1500 of those employees live in Amherst.

Local businesses are dependent on educational institutions: The retail sector within Amherst is extremely reliant upon expenditures from the students, faculty, and staff at the University and Colleges. This is not surprising, given the Town’s large student population and the economic significance of these institutions.

Modest but steady growth in retail sales: A significant proportion of retail sales in Hampshire County (11.6 percent) occur within Amherst. The U.S. Economic Census for 1997 and 2002 shows that Amherst has experienced modest but steady growth in many retail sectors between those years. The concentration of retail sales in Amherst are: Food and Beverage stores; Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book and Music stores; Building Materials and Garden Equipment; Gasoline Stations; and Non-store Retailers (such as mail-order businesses).

Real estate rental rates: Retail space in Amherst ranges from \$8.50 per square foot to \$14.50 per square foot. By comparison, nearby Northampton has retail rentals ranging from \$12 to \$30 per square foot, depending on the location. These somewhat comparable figures indicate that Amherst is a desirable, although less robust retail location as compared to Northampton.

Limited job growth: The jobs which exist within Amherst, specifically those related to educational services, are relatively stable and grow during times of political consensus on the value of higher education (such as the UMass 250 Plan). Other job sectors in Amherst, particularly traditional businesses such as retail and service businesses, are disproportionately small for a community this size, and are much more vulnerable to economic down-cycles. Despite the recent growth in information-based business and consultancies, the relative shortage of non-academic job opportunities and growth limits the opportunity for college and high school alumni to stay in the community following graduation, and hampers the community’s efforts to support economic and social diversity.

Reliance on tax-exempt institutions: The majority of the Town’s private sector rely on income generated by patrons from the University and Colleges. These educational institutions are tax-exempt. With relatively static commercial development in Amherst,

the fiscal burden for providing municipal services rests heavily on the Town's residential property owners.

The Objectives and Strategies discussed in the remainder of this chapter provide a coherent framework for meeting Amherst's goals for economic development. They focus on a variety of initiatives, including creating vibrancy in the downtown and village centers, as well as attracting more businesses in the research, technology, and creative industries.

D. Objectives and Strategies

This section describes the objectives and strategies that will support the Economic Development goal for the Town of Amherst.

OBJECTIVE E.1 - Support sustainable growth of existing businesses and attract new ones while protecting environmental values.

Smart growth principles (see www.smartgrowth.org) should be used to support sustainable business growth while preserving Amherst's character and protecting the environment. The following strategies address issues of zoning, infrastructure, and economic policy that can attract targeted industries to Amherst.

STRATEGIES

E.1.A Develop zoning that encourages sustainable high-density mixed-use and residential development within the village centers and downtown.

Higher density, mixed-use development can be encouraged to enhance and revitalize the village centers and downtown. Connecting and integrating residential areas with businesses and retail uses that provide goods, services, and jobs reduces infrastructure costs and transportation impacts. It creates a mutually-supportive environment in which residents have easier access to services and businesses have better access to a substantial customer base.

E.1.B Market and promote Amherst to targeted business.

The community should identify the specific types of businesses or industries that it would like to attract to Amherst, and the kinds of growth it wants to see. The Town should work with the business community and other stakeholders (UMass, colleges, property owners, adjacent communities) to conduct a comprehensive market study to identify specific businesses and industries currently missing from the community that might strengthen Amherst's overall economic fabric. Incentives and marketing tools should then be developed to promote the community and attract the desired types of businesses and industries.

E.1.C Make downtown/village centers vital, attractive, and convenient to use.

Several kinds of strategic improvements should be pursued in the downtown and village centers to create a mutually supportive mix of retail, professional, and residential uses, and an attractive, enjoyable environment for residents and visitors.

Marketing Studies - The Town should work with the businesses and property owners in the downtown and village centers to conduct targeted market studies specific to those areas to identify missing goods and services and then act to attract specific types of desired businesses.

Regulations - Development regulations should be revised to encourage downtown and village center upper floor residences.

Physical Improvements - Attention should be paid to pedestrian amenities, streetscapes, public spaces, parking, wayfinding signs, public art, and other improvements to attract more people to the downtown and village centers.

E.1.D Increase the amount of suitably zoned research park, business, and commercial areas that are provided with appropriate Town infrastructure.

The Town should evaluate its zoning map and infrastructure plans to see if appropriate lands are available and readily usable for desirable economic growth. New areas may need to be provided with key infrastructure in order to make Amherst a more competitive destination for business investments.

E.1.E Increase land zoned for professional, light industrial and commercial use.

Amherst has a relatively small amount of land area zoned for business activity. The Town should identify and increase the overall acreage of land in Amherst zoned to allow professional and light industrial areas, as well as commercial centers.

E.1.F Provide incentives for high priority, targeted development.

The Town should identify its development priorities, design a package of incentives, and undertake pre-development activities to facilitate development in these areas. These priorities should include evaluating and developing professional research park areas, identifying and redeveloping brown-fields sites, as well as pursuing mixed-use infill and redevelopment projects in downtown and village centers, and carefully expanding those centers. To accomplish this, Amherst could seek out state grant programs, provide density bonuses, provide infrastructure improvements, and/or explore tax incentives.

OBJECTIVE E.2 – Support “relocalization” of the Amherst economy

Many communities around the country are recognizing the value of their own local economies and are engaging in “local first” initiatives. Locally-owned, independent businesses tend to re-circulate a higher percentage of their profits within the local economy, and are more invested in the community’s future. Locally grown produce and locally made products require substantially less transportation and consume fewer energy resources than those brought in from other states or countries. This reduces Amherst’s environmental footprint while supporting local markets.

Promoting a sustainable local economy also helps Amherst maintain its distinctive community character.

STRATEGIES

E.2.A Hire an Economic Development Director.

The Town should create the permanent position of Economic Development Director to work with the Chamber of Commerce, local merchants, professionals, farmers, tradesfolk, artisans, and government to foster and coordinate economic development efforts in Amherst.

E.2.B Support and expand initiatives to market local products, support local businesses, and services.

One of the first responsibilities of an Economic Development Director would be to work with the community to develop specific ways to support and encourage local business. Examples might include:

- An Amherst Grown/Amherst Made sticker might be made available to local businesses through the Chamber of Commerce, to help shoppers identify local products.
- Amherst’s longstanding Farmer’s Market on the Town Common is a sound local economic tradition that should be replicated in new and innovative ways. An indoor facility allowing year-round operation of a downtown or village center farmers’ market should be explored. An outdoor marketplace should be considered for Kendrick Park. Downtown sidewalk vending could be encouraged with appropriate regulation.
- Existing programs that offer discounts to downtown business patrons who can demonstrate that they shop at other local businesses should be expanded and replicated in Amherst’s outlying village centers and commercial areas.

E.2.C Explore a reloadable cash-substitute "Amherst Card" that could be used for local shopping, entertainment, dining, parking, transit, and event or attraction admission.

An “Amherst Card” could be used by residents and visitors to easily navigate parking, transit, and shopping, and other activities in the

downtown. The Town should work with representatives from the colleges and business community to determine the feasibility of the card, potential market, security issues, and costs.

OBJECTIVE E.3 - Promote downtown as a key cultural, commercial and entertainment center of Amherst.

Downtown Amherst is a great asset that can be better utilized as a cultural, commercial, and entertainment center. The following strategies suggest ways to enhance the downtown as the vibrant heart of the community.

STRATEGIES

E.3.A Conduct a broad market assessment of the downtown to better target businesses and visitors.

As part of a marketing study (see E.1.C), the community should conduct an assessment of existing assets and current needs in the downtown in terms of the “creative economy”—the arts and cultural, commercial, and entertainment opportunities. The Town’s Economic Development Director, working with the Chamber of Commerce and Promoting Downtown Amherst (PDA), should identify key aspects of the downtown and market and enhance them in order to attract more businesses and visitors.

E.3.B Explore cooperative business, promotional and marketing ventures that reinforce local investment and control.

In addition to expanding cooperation between the Chamber of Commerce, Promoting Downtown Amherst, and the Town, the business community and the Town should explore the creation of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to enable greater private investment and participation in the improvement of the downtown business district and village centers.

E.3.C Resolve parking needs and improve accessibility to and circulation within downtown.

The Town should investigate a variety of transportation strategies to meet parking needs and improve circulation in the downtown. Initiatives may range from developing an off-street parking facility, to maximizing on-street parking opportunities, to investing in public and alternative transportation infrastructure that can reduce the number of cars on the road. Signalization and other traffic circulation issues should also be examined.

E.3.D Develop downtown and the Town’s natural resources as tourism destinations by leveraging existing cultural, historical, entertainment and education resources, providing inviting streetscapes and developing new attractions.

Tourism provides a net economic benefit to the community by bringing outside dollars into Amherst. The community should examine ways to further enhance the attractions and amenities found in the downtown and surrounding natural areas in order to emphasize tourism as a key component of the Town's economy, while planning for ways to protect these important resources and mitigate the impacts of tourism. See NC.1.

E.3.E Capture “secondary (follow-on) market” of visitors to colleges and university.

UMass and the Colleges attract a large number of visitors throughout the year (families, prospective students, conference attendees, etc.). The Town should collaborate with educational institutions in order to market local attractions and amenities and fully capture the follow-on tourism market associated with these schools.

OBJECTIVE E.4 - Broaden and leverage partnerships with UMass and the Colleges.

The Town, UMass, and the Colleges should pursue mutually beneficial partnerships in order to promote economic development, undertake research and technology enterprises, and create more learning and job opportunities for college and university students.

STRATEGIES

E.4.A Develop and implement a shared town-gown strategy for economic development to achieve common goals.

The Town, the business community, and the University and Colleges should work together to develop a set of shared economic development goals that can be effectively pursued through town-gown partnerships.

E.4.B Promote economic development projects at the University and colleges that produce tax revenues for the Town.

Through partnerships between the Town and the University and colleges, it is possible to create economic development projects that will produce additional revenues for the Town and benefit all Amherst residents.

E.4.C Establish the real cost of the University and colleges to the Town and negotiate fair compensation.

The Town provides a variety of public services that support the University and colleges. An external, impartial fiscal analysis should be undertaken to examine the real costs and benefits that these institutions bring to the Town. Once this is established, agreements can be made to ensure that the Town is compensated fairly.

E.4.D Encourage and assist UMass in its efforts to create a research park that provides for commercialization and business expansion of university/college research, including incubator space for companies.

Economic development stakeholders should work with UMass to design a research facility that provides space for research, high-tech firms, and start-up companies. Such a facility would provide the opportunity for collaborative relationships between the business and University community, and could catalyze further economic development in the Town.

E.4.E Explore development of taxable student housing in appropriate locations.

Providing private, student-village housing for UMass students would generate tax revenues and reduce pressure on rents for affordable housing elsewhere in Town. Such housing should be well-designed and appropriately sited to respect the context and values of the surrounding Amherst community. See also LU.1.B and H.7.

E.4.F Share university, college and Town facilities and resources for mutual benefit.

The Town, University, and colleges should identify and evaluate existing assets and facilities that could be shared to further enhance quality of life in the community and attract additional economic activity.

OBJECTIVE E.5 - Improve the regulatory environment to encourage business development.

The following strategies suggest how the Town should review and update its regulatory processes in order to attract new businesses to Amherst.

STRATEGIES

E.5.A Re-examine administrative permit procedures and regulatory by-laws, streamline business regulation and expedite permitting to provide regionally competitive, responsive and timely services to businesses.

A transparent, streamlined, and responsive business permitting process can greatly improve Amherst's competitiveness in attracting new businesses. Targeted industries and businesses should receive extra guidance and support during the permitting process.

E.5.B Allow pre-permitting in targeted development zones.

In appropriate target areas, establish basic requirements for appropriate uses, site planning, and design, so that projects which meet those Town requirements can obtain approvals through a streamlined permit process.

OBJECTIVE E.6 - Create an Integrated Economic Development Program.

Amherst's economic development stakeholders should work together to set strategic priorities and identify who will take the lead in all aspects of the Town's economic growth and revitalization.

STRATEGIES

E.6.A Organize and develop financial and staff resources to support the Town's economic development program and strategic plan.

In order to ensure that economic development activities are successful, a basic level of staffing and funding is required with specific responsibility for coordinating initiatives, tracking their progress, and publicizing successes. Sufficient staff resources can ensure that Amherst stays on track in working towards its economic goals.

E.6.B Assign a permanent committee to help oversee development and implementation of a comprehensive economic development strategic plan.

A Town committee should be assigned responsibility for working with an Economic Development Director to oversee ongoing implementation of Amherst's economic development strategic plan. Membership of this committee should represent the Amherst's diverse economic development interests and organizations.

OBJECTIVE E.7 - Encourage physical and technological infrastructure that support business and industrial growth.

The Town should invest in infrastructure and technological advancements that enable business attraction and retention.

STRATEGIES

E.7.A Improve and expand internet communication/broadband (including wireless availability) throughout the Town, including high-speed connections (Internet2 and other state of the art technology).

Many communities around the country are pursuing technological advantages that can give them an edge in attracting and retaining businesses and enhancing quality of life for residents. Amherst should undertake steps to ensure that all areas are covered by high-speed internet providers. The Town should also examine the possibility of offering expanded free wireless connection in strategic locations, such as the downtown.

E.7.B Support growth of burgeoning technology and creative economy businesses, including development of necessary facilities.

The Town should target investments to attract innovating industries such as technology firms and “creative economy” businesses that have a focus on arts, culture, and design. Amherst can create targeted business attraction and retention programs that incorporate tax incentives, workforce development assistance, and infrastructure and service amenities.

OBJECTIVE E.8 - Develop the current and future workforce to enhance economic opportunities.

Current Amherst employment opportunities do not adequately support those interested in occupations (trades and other professions) other than education. Key issues underlying this objective are the need to address socio-economic balance in Amherst and the potential costs (social justice aspects) of not taking action. There is the concern that long-time residents and their children are being driven out of Amherst in search of work and, eventually, other places to live. The following strategies examine how education, training, and mentoring opportunities can be used to enhance Amherst’s workforce base and increase the Town’s economic prosperity.

STRATEGIES

E.8.A Provide internships in local businesses (including agricultural) to high school and college students.

Internships are a highly successful means for students to gain valuable work experience while also discovering possible career paths. Internships provide benefits to both the employer and the student while spurring future economic development, since interns are often considered as prospective employees.

E.8.B Create a network of advisors to mentor new businesses in Town ranging from the virtual company to ‘bricks and mortar’ businesses.

The Town should work cooperatively with local business owners and merchants and with the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce to develop mentoring programs that help increase the likelihood of success of new businesses in the area.

OBJECTIVE E.9 - Advocate for changes to state tax regulation in order to allow a reformulation of the Town's tax structure.

Based on current state laws, property taxes are the primary—and nearly the only—way local municipalities can collect revenue. Most other taxation is controlled by the State. The rates are also capped at a 2.5 percent increase from year to year unless a town-wide override referendum is passed by the voters. There are some efforts currently underway to convince the state legislature to allow municipalities other ways to collect revenues, such as meals and lodging taxes. The Town should advocate for an alternative tax structure.

STRATEGIES

E.9.A Link and partner with other municipal and state-wide advocacy groups to promote significant relief of property taxes.

Property taxes are a major burden on homeowners in Amherst. Through partnerships with other municipal and State advocacy groups, there is a greater opportunity to make change and relieve homeowners of the property tax burden, which is lowering their quality of life.

6. Natural and Cultural Resources



Master Plan

A. GOAL

Preserve the Town's historic fabric and agrarian and academic heritage, and protect the quality of our natural resources, to ensure a vibrant, diverse, sustainable community.

B. Overview

The Amherst community takes great pride in and identity from its natural and cultural resources. The town's character is defined by a rural landscape with high aesthetic value that accommodates natural, wildlife, and recreational areas as well as agricultural activities. The community is actively engaged in efforts to preserve these areas and protect them from development. The Town is also home to a rich cultural environment, with three institutions of higher learning, as well as numerous historically significant structures. A number of key themes surface throughout this chapter, including: the desire to enhance cultural activities and events for residents and visitors alike; the potential to explore more Town-Gown collaborations; the importance of strategic land conservation; the need to protect historic resources; and the desire to promote an ethic of sustainability throughout the Amherst community.

C. Existing Conditions

An assessment of the Town's existing conditions has been drawn by the consulting team based on technical research, as well as discussions with the CPC and Town Staff. The complete Existing Conditions and Trends report can be found in Appendix A. This section summarizes the report's key points related to natural and cultural resources:

Natural features: Amherst's undulating glacial topography adds to the aesthetic value of the Town and offers areas of hiking and recreation, as well as wildlife habitat. The widely varied soil composition in Amherst is a product of its recent geological history, including glacial Lake Hitchcock, which covered a majority of the Connecticut River Basin. Soils suitable for prime farmland uses are also highly suitable for urbanized development, so clear growth management policies are necessary to retain natural and agricultural landscapes. Other areas are rocky or marshy, and the town is drained by several small rivers and major streams that are an important part of the industrial history of Amherst.

Farmland preservation: Of Amherst's 2,566 acres of farmland, 1,841 acres are protected under Agricultural Preservation

Restrictions (APR). Farmland acreage not currently under APR is considered vulnerable to potential land development.

Conservation areas: According to the Town's Land Use Map, 2,573 acres of Amherst's land are protected for conservation purposes due to efforts by the Amherst Conservation Commission, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, and Amherst citizens.

Water resources: The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection identifies approximately 53 acres of water bodies covering the Town, including the Mill and Fort Rivers, which are major tributaries of the Connecticut River. Lawrence Swamp is a significant wetland in Amherst and a habitat for rare species. All of the Town public water supply wells are located in the Lawrence Swamp Aquifer. Implementation of Best Management Practices is essential to protecting the quality of the Town's water supply.

Historic resources: Amherst has participated in the National Register of Historic Places since 1966. Nine districts and nine other individual properties are listed on the National Register. The community is interested in developing a complete inventory of its historic resources and pursuing additional historic and archeological preservation activities under the provisions of the 2005 Amherst Preservation Plan.

Town/Gown cultural resources: Amherst College, Hampshire College, and the University of Massachusetts have museums, galleries, and performance spaces that significantly contribute to the menu of cultural activities in the Town. The community is interested in pursuing opportunities to further enhance cultural collaborations throughout the local arts community.

The Objectives and Strategies discussed in the remainder of this chapter provide a coherent framework for preserving and enhancing Amherst's natural and cultural resources in a manner that will help the community retain its natural character and celebrate its cultural assets for years to come.

D. Objectives and Strategies

This section describes the objectives and strategies that will support the Natural and Cultural Resources goal for the Town of Amherst.

OBJECTIVE NC.1 - Promote the preservation, appreciation, and sustainable use of our historical and cultural resources for residents and visitors.

Historic and cultural resources foster a connection to the Amherst community, generate a sense of pride among its residents, and attract visitors to the Town. Appropriate protection and celebration of these resources will ensure that the community's heritage and unique character are preserved and passed on to future generations. Implementation of the 2005 Amherst Preservation Plan and the following strategies will preserve important community character for Amherst's future while acting as a crucial form of local economic development.

STRATEGIES

NC.1.A Regularly update the inventory and map of Amherst's historic resources and ensure that they are available to the Inspections Services Department and other permitting staff when reviewing permit applications. Using the Town's computerized permit-tracking system, link demolition permit requests with the historic resource information available for that property.

The Town of Amherst and local preservation organizations should collaborate to update the Town's inventory and GIS mapping of historic resources and make the map accessible to the public. Checking the historic status of a building or property should be made an automatic administrative step in any permit process.

NC.1.B Increase historic preservation protections in Amherst's zoning regulations, in order to encourage preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of historic and archeological resources.

A special historic overlay district is one example of a measure that could provide specific development and design regulations above and beyond regular zoning in order to protect areas of historic and architectural significance in the Amherst community. Such measures could allow certain land uses by right or offer incentives if the proposed use met minimum historic standards. An overlay district or other measures could be applied to existing National Historic Register districts, areas that have been proposed to receive National Historic Register designation, and other historic resources indicated by the Amherst Preservation Plan or deemed significant by the Amherst Historical Commission.

NC.1.C Establish new local historic districts to provide enhanced protections for our most significant concentrations of historic resources.

Amherst has several National Historic Register Districts, but no local historic districts—a specialized regulatory district enabled under state law (MGL. Ch. 40C). The National Historic Register Districts only provide

protections if federal or state funds are involved in any development proposal or project that will affect the historic property. Currently, the Town zoning regulations include a Demolition Delay Bylaw that allows the Historic Commission to delay by up to 12 months the demolition of an historic property. The Town should develop separate local historic districts that contain regulatory language capable of protecting historic resources in ways that zoning cannot.

NC.1.D Preserve historic properties through direct acquisition and the use of historic preservation restrictions.

Amherst has long used outright purchase or the acquisition of interests in property—easements, deed restrictions, etc.—to preserve important conservation lands and, more recently, affordable housing. Purchase of interests in the most critical historic properties in Amherst should follow this model.

NC.1.E Encourage preservation, restoration and rehabilitation/ adaptive reuse of historic buildings and outbuildings through a variety of financial and other initiatives

The Amherst community should make use of appropriate incentives to promote the restoration and reuse of its historic buildings. A variety of tools should be used to encourage the preservation, reuse, and rehabilitation of historic buildings. These could include, among others:

- Tax incentives and abatements
- Federal funding assistance or tax credits
- A low-interest revolving loan program for rehabilitating historic buildings
- Shortened project review time, and
- Permitting of additional uses in certain designated historic structures, among others.

A non-profit organization such as the private non-profit Amherst Historical Society could take the lead on instituting a revolving loan or historic trust program that will provide owners of historic properties with additional financing opportunities to support historic renovations and rehabilitations.

NC.1.F Complete, expand, and improve the existing wayfinding sign system, to mark historic districts and village centers, and to encourage tourism.

An improved system of wayfinding and historic site signs is needed for tourists and visitors, and can also be essential for increasing overall public awareness about—and thereby protecting—Amherst’s historic resources. The Historical Commission, Design Review Board, Department of Public Works, Chamber of Commerce, and the Town/Commercial Relations

Committee, among others, should engage in a collaborative initiative to update, enhance, and fund the wayfinding sign system in Amherst.

NC.1.G Develop outreach tools (tours, print publications, web sites, etc.) to disseminate knowledge of Amherst’s history among the public.

Building public awareness of the unique historic resources of Amherst and the benefits of protecting them in terms of quality of life, community character, and economic benefits is a critical step to securing the support of the general public, property owners, and elected officials in the pursuit of historic preservation initiatives. The Amherst community should develop outreach tools such as bus and walking tours, brochures, websites, and workshops in order to build public awareness about Town history.

NC.1.H Work with the Chamber of Commerce to encourage sustainable cultural tourism.

Thoughtful development of cultural tourism can help preserve Amherst’s unique character while strengthening and diversifying the local economy. The Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce publicizes a Visitor’s Guide that provides a variety of information about local historic and cultural attractions. The community should continue to work with the Chamber to expand its efforts to promote cultural tourism in the community.

NC.1.I Develop a street tree inventory and shade tree replacement plan to ensure that this important element of Amherst’s historical landscape will be sustained over time.

A tree inventory should be undertaken to gather accurate information on the health and diversity of Amherst’s community forest, including its street trees and shade trees. This inventory, which can be conducted through collaboration among the Department of Public Works, Tree Warden, the Public Shade Tree Commission, and community volunteers will help the community develop and prioritize its tree maintenance and replacement activities, and will form the basis of a community forestry management plan.

OBJECTIVE NC.2 - Provide support for a rich variety of cultural opportunities, and activities for all groups and individuals in the community.

Amherst has been a community unusually rich in the arts throughout its history. This represents not only a source of community culture and character, but an important opportunity to promote the creative economy as an element of Amherst's economic development. In developing community support systems for the arts, the Town should work closely with the colleges and University, which represent a significant source of venues, artists, and other resources. In addition to better supporting cultural activities for the community at large, such collaboration could help improve town-gown relations and expand cultural interactions.

STRATEGIES

NC.2.A Create an inventory of local organizations and resources in all fields of the arts and arts-related cultural endeavors.

An inventory of arts-related organizations and resources in Amherst and on the campuses should be developed and made available to the community at large. This can serve as a first step to better use of these resources and fostering additional town-gown collaborations among local artists and arts and cultural organizations. Amherst College, for instance, has already established young artists programs in collaboration with the high school.

NC.2.B. Inventory and assess performance, assembly, and exhibit venues within the community (including open air spaces, meeting rooms, etc.).

The community should undertake a complete inventory of performance, assembly, and exhibit spaces available in the community and on the campuses. The inventory would assess issues such as space size, capacity, location, and availability for bookings from outside organizations. By synthesizing this information the Amherst community can encourage full use of its existing cultural facilities.

NC.2.C Work with Five Colleges Inc. to organize opportunities for joint programming and promotion of cultural events between the community, the colleges and University.

A cultural event committee with representation from the University, Colleges, Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Committee, and Cultural Commission, among others, should be established to identify and encourage joint programming opportunities that will enhance town-gown interactions and take full advantage of the community's cultural resources.

NC.2.D Create a clearinghouse to compile and disseminate information on cultural resources and events through a variety of

outlets (e.g., web site, brochures, broadcast media, Internet kiosks, etc.).

A single clearinghouse should be established through a public, non-profit or private entity (Chamber of Commerce?) to facilitate cultural publicity efforts, reduce overlaps in community and campus event scheduling, and help community members, campus residents, and visitors access complete and up-to-date information about cultural activities. This clearinghouse can be translated into a calendar of events that is appropriate for publication and distribution through websites, brochures, newspapers, magazines, etc.

NC.2.E Develop a Visitors' Center in the Town center that provides information and amenities such as public restrooms, publicity materials, and a calendar of events.

In collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, a Visitors' Center should be created to serve as a first stop for visitors to Amherst. The Visitor Center should be located in an easily accessible, clearly designated location. It can offer maps and a variety of 24 hr./day visitor information regarding community and campus cultural events, attractions, shopping, restaurants, lodging, etc. The need for such a center has long been discussed, but its complexities have made it difficult to achieve. Amherst's ability to welcome visitors and to sustain successful levels of historical/cultural tourism depend on the community's ability to overcome past obstacles and make this center a reality.

NC.2.F Increase the amount of civic and/or public space in the Town center through incentives and zoning.

Attractive public streetscapes and civic spaces are important to the quality of life in Amherst. As larger developments occur downtown, developers should be required to provide attractive, publicly accessible gathering spaces and civic facilities. Both incentives and zoning updates can be implemented to achieve this result.

NC.2.G Provide incentives to building owners to increase space for locally-produced public art and performances (e.g., public acknowledgement, density bonuses, opening-hour extensions).

Providing public art can be an effective way to develop community identity, feature the work of local artists, and convey a unique sense of place. As public improvements are funded and constructed, public art should be incorporated. In addition, a variety of incentives can be devised to engage private property owners in the development and enhancement of public art and public performance spaces.

NC.2.H Establish a revolving loan/trust fund to support public art and resident artists.

Many communities, cultural institutions, and colleges throughout the country develop resident artist programs as a way to enhance community culture, support working artists, and educate the public about the arts. The Amherst community should consider ways to establish a revolving loan/trust fund to support additional public art and bring resident artists into the community. The fund and associated programs can be developed in collaboration with local arts organizations and the University and colleges.

NC.2.I Sponsor design competitions for streetscape fixtures (bus stops, furniture, recycling bins, etc.)

Streetscape design is of central importance to creating a quality public realm. Well designed amenities such as street lights, bus stops, benches, garbage and recycling bins, etc., can be used to enhance community character and create a distinct sense of place. The Amherst community should sponsor design competitions in order to generate new ideas for creating attractive, unified streetscapes in Amherst. This initiative can be targeted to local architects, artists, landscape architects, planners, industrial designers, etc., as well as students in affiliated departments at the University and colleges. The competition could also be extended outside of the community as appropriate.

OBJECTIVE NC.3 - Conserve land in sufficient quantity and quality to meet agricultural, recreational, and wildlife needs.

Open land does a lot of work for Amherst. Keeping critical tracts of land undeveloped is important for maintaining and protecting wildlife, water resources, recreation opportunities, local farm production, and the region's unique rural character. A range of land conservation tools can be used to protect such areas and corridors, including transfers of development rights, donated conservation easements, and land acquisition by public or not-for-profit agencies.

STRATEGIES

NC.3.A Identify and permanently protect highest-quality habitats in coordination with state agencies.

In conjunction with the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, the Town should identify its most significant wildlife habitats and undertake measures to permanently protect and appropriately manage these lands.

NC.3.B Identify and permanently protect lands buffering Amherst water supply wells and reservoirs from development. Apply appropriate conservation mechanisms to protect Amherst's water supply lands.

In order to protect water quality in Amherst, the community should identify and protect lands that buffer significant water resources such as surface reservoirs, wells, and aquifers. Several conservation tools can be used to protect such areas, including transfers of development rights, donated conservation easements, and land acquisition by public or not-for-profit agencies. One example is the Water Enterprise Fund, which takes in fees from an annual water bill received by all users/property owners, and pays for upkeep and expansion of the water supply system, including purchase of watershed lands.

NC.3.C Identify and permanently protect lands containing priority soil types for agricultural and other resource-based activities (e.g., farming, forestry).

Healthy soil is important to maintaining a healthy community. Quality soils control water runoff, filter pollutants, sustain plant and animal life, and cycle nutrients. Amherst should identify its priority soil areas and institute land protection initiatives to ensure that these soils remain healthy and safe from erosion. Information on soil quality and conservation is available from the National Resources Conservation Service at <http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/>.

NC.3.D Identify and permanently protect important wildlife corridors from development in order to connect fragmented habitats and facilitate local and regional wildlife movement.

The Town should seek to identify and permanently protect its most significant wildlife corridors. Major wildlife crossings along roadways should be clearly marked in order to protect humans and animals alike.

NC.3.E Revise the Open Space and Recreation Plan to prioritize areas most suitable for land protection and/or development.

The community should ensure that the next update of the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) accounts for all of Amherst's major green infrastructure resources, including open space, natural resource areas, wildlife habitats, agricultural lands, recreational lands, and greenways and trails. In addition to recommending key lands for future protection and conservation, the OSRP can also help identify areas that are more appropriate for future development.

NC.3.F Create additional incentives in the permit process for development projects that preserve meaningful areas of viable open space/habitat contiguous to undeveloped or protected portions of land on adjacent properties.

The Town should establish method(s) for evaluating development projects under any revised zoning regulations to provide incentives for projects that demonstrate good development practices furthering the community's goals (affordable housing, protecting farmland, etc.) and that

provide disincentives for projects that do not further the community's goals or which result in undesirable development.

NC.3.G Actively manage Town-owned conservation land as wildlife habitat.

Develop programs which ensure that Town-owned conservation lands are actively managed in order to restore and enhance wildlife habitats for both game and non-game species. A variety of information related to habitat management can be found through the Wildlife Habitat Council (www.wildlifehc.org).

OBJECTIVE NC.4 - Apply principles of environmental sustainability town-wide.

Sustainable environmental practices should be shared with the public and actively promoted to foster a sense of stewardship in the community. The following strategies suggest approaches for how everyone – including residents, businesses, Town government, the University and colleges, and the development community, among others – can get involved in creating a more sustainable community.

STRATEGIES

NC.4.A Establish an incentive program for green building design standards for new and renovated municipal, commercial, and residential development.

The US Green Buildings Council has developed the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building rating system to serve as a national benchmark for green building design. There are other emerging new energy and environmental standards which may also be appropriate for consideration. The Town should research these standards, and then adopt appropriate building and site development regulations tied to incentives (density bonuses, etc.) to help ensure that new development, redevelopment, and renovations are aligned with sustainable energy and environmental practices. More information is available at <http://www.usgbc.org/>.

NC.4.B Create zoning regulations and local tax incentives to encourage or, where possible, mandate cluster subdivision design, construction of energy-efficient buildings, green/sustainable site design, and use of renewable energy sources (solar, wind, thermal, photo-voltaic, etc.).

Tax abatements, accelerated permitting processes, and other incentives such as technical assistance grants should be used to encourage more environmentally-friendly development in Amherst. Initiatives should promote green building design, the use of renewable energy sources, and

more sustainable project design (such as well-connected, mixed-use, higher density cluster subdivisions, traditional neighborhood developments, and/or infill projects).

NC.4.C Implement a program of education and incentives to promote green lifestyles among Amherst citizens.

Public outreach efforts and incentive programs can be used to present clear messages and persuade residents to take steps towards creating a greener community. Residents should be encouraged to adopt energy-efficient technologies in their homes, and incorporate environmentally-friendly practices into their everyday lifestyles (such as choosing alternative transportation methods in order to reduce personal automobile travel).

NC.4.D Place dedicated recycling receptacles in public spaces in the downtown and village centers to facilitate and encourage recycling.

Recycling receptacles should be designed to be attractive and easily visible, and should be strategically placed in public spaces in the downtown and village centers. This will help residents and visitors recycle even when they are away from home.

NC.4.E “Green” the schools as a means of both implementing and teaching sustainability.

Where feasible, the Amherst community should encourage:

- Green building design standards for school renovation projects and furnishings.
- Use of organic/local produce and fresh foods in the school cafeterias.
- Student use of buses and other alternatives to the personal auto.
- Collective transportation for private schools.
- Increased recycling efforts.
- Educating students about sustainable choices in areas ranging from nutrition to the environment.

By pursuing some of the initiatives recommended in this strategy, Amherst’s schools can reduce their environmental impact, enhance environmental curriculums, and help to cultivate a culture of sustainability throughout the community. Students, parents, and ultimately all community members will benefit from greater attention to green building, responsible transportation options, sustainable food choices, and recycling efforts.

NC.4.F Develop and promote a green motto for Amherst (“Amherst goes green” or the like). Under this initiative, give out rewards/awards/plaques for lifestyle choices.

The Amherst community should develop a “green identity” that incorporates a green motto, communications strategy, and programming initiative. This approach can be used to educate the public and galvanize

community support for and engagement in environmental initiatives. Celebratory events and awards can be used to spur widespread community involvement.



Master Plan

7. Open Space and Recreation

A. Goal

Protect and enhance our rural character and agricultural viability, and provide and develop multi-use and multi-generational recreational opportunities that bring townspeople together.

B. Overview

Amherst has for many years acted on its commitment to preserve the community's unique landscape and character. The Town has been steadily acquiring critical lands for conservation since 1963. Today, a total of 4,849.5 acres, or 27.3 percent of Amherst's land area, is permanently protected land. The Town is committed to protecting more land, to preserve the community's open space and provide adequate recreational opportunities as new growth occurs.

Several recurring themes appear throughout this chapter, including: the desire to support local farming; the need to increase the amount of existing open spaces and expand the trail system through innovative land use policies and zoning; and the desire to create new and successful recreational facilities to improve the quality of life in the community. Fulfilling many of this Plan's recreation objectives will require a shift in priorities in the Town's budget.

C. Existing Conditions

This assessment of the Town's existing open space and recreation conditions was developed by the consulting team based on technical research, as well as discussions with the CPC and Town staff. The Town's own plans and studies, including but not limited to the draft 2007 "Open Space & Recreation Plan," "Amherst Comprehensive Planning Study: Defining Village Boundaries and Open Space Preservation Strategies," and the "Town of Amherst Community Development Plan" were closely consulted. This section summarizes the current open space and recreation conditions:

- **An extensive network of parks, open space, and recreation resources:** The amount of open space and recreational resources within Amherst is already extensive. Highlights include the Mount Holyoke Range State Park and an 80+ mile network of hiking trails that traverses the Town.

A variety of land protection approaches: For 40 years, Amherst has used outright purchase, acquisition of easements and deed restrictions, and development regulations to protect many kinds of land—including parks, open space and recreational facilities—and to preserve critical conservation lands, wildlife habitat, water

supplies, scenic views, agricultural lands, and the community's historic landscapes. Permanently protected lands include Town conservation areas, Agricultural Preservation Restriction farmland, recreation areas and schools, private land trusts, conservation restrictions, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation land, and open land required to be provided by private developers during the permitting process. Currently, the Town's regulations encourage development in existing developed areas, while preserving farmland and conservation lands in the outlying areas.

- **Land preservation priorities:** Several areas of Amherst have been identified as priorities for continued conservation efforts. Those areas are Pulpit Hill, the Cushman Brook green belt corridor, the Plum Brook green belt corridor, the block of farmland in the northwest corner of Amherst, consolidation of existing blocks of partially-protected farm and conservation lands, and the Holyoke Range.
- **A trail system:** Currently, Amherst has more than eighty miles of maintained trails. The trail system includes approximately fifty different trails designed to accommodate diverse users.
- **A need to protect the region's natural attractions:** Amherst is located within the Pioneer Valley—the middle stretch of the Connecticut River valley in western Massachusetts. Amherst's landscapes offer a great variety of natural recreational activities including fishing, hunting, hiking, skiing, boating, and cycling. This wealth of natural habitat should be preserved, managed, and promoted as a natural and economic asset that serves as a sustainable resource for the community, tourists, and visitors.
- **Recreational leadership:** A variety of organizations contribute to the recreational activities in Amherst, including the Leisure Services and Supplemental Education Department, a wide range of private groups, public schools, colleges, and the university.

The Objectives and Strategies discussed in the remainder of this chapter provide a coherent framework for approaching Amherst's future of open spaces and recreation. They reconcile the need to preserve land to support local farms and natural habitats while also providing a variety of recreational areas for the enjoyment of the community at large.

D. Objectives and Strategies

This section describes the objectives and strategies that will support the Open Space and Recreation goal for the Town of Amherst.

OBJECTIVE O.1 - Protect land that provides significant value for agriculture, watershed protection, trail systems, habitat, and biodiversity.

Amherst has a highly valued rural landscape and a commitment to preserving open spaces. Continued efforts should be made to conserve and expand habitats, watersheds, trail systems, and agricultural lands in order to protect native plant and animal species and maintain the area's unique character. The following strategies recommend how this can be achieved.

STRATEGIES

O.1.A Continue to identify key conservation, recreation, and agricultural land parcels for future acquisition or protection.

The community should continue to work to identify and prioritize significant land parcels that should be acquired by the Town or otherwise protected. Potential acquisition targets need to be inventoried and assessed for their environmental, recreational, and scenic value, as well as their potential vulnerability to development pressures and connection to existing protected parcels and greenways.

O.1.B Match these parcels with public and private programs that will support acquisition and/or protection.

The Town of Amherst has played a very active role in acquiring conservation lands. In addition to public acquisition of lands, the Town should continue to work with private conservation organizations such as land trusts to further open space protection efforts.

O.1.C Augment the public trail and transportation system with permission from private landowners.

The Town should continue to maintain close contact with residents, businesses, and those that own parcels of land that have been targeted for future greenway or trail expansion. In addition to better connections between conservation and recreation areas, private trail connections can provide access for pedestrians and bicyclists between residential, commercial, and institutional destinations and public rights-of-way and public transit stops, as a means of encouraging sustainable transportation. Regular communications should be used to educate landowners about the importance of greenways and trails, and offer incentives for the granting of easements.

O.1.D Use zoning bylaws to encourage design that protects and enhances the landscape.

Zoning regulations can be used as an important tool to reduce human impact on natural areas. Types of creative zoning include open space offsets, transfers of development rights, and preservation banks, among others. These approaches retain a large percentage (or all) of a development site as

natural or open space in exchange for allowing higher density development in a more appropriate area. Regulations should also be established to ensure that when development is proposed adjacent to ecologically significant areas, it adheres to dimensional and design standards that minimize impact on the natural environment.

OBJECTIVE O.2 - Improve the economic viability of the farm community within Amherst.

The Town should support the economic viability of the local farm community by continuing to develop and pursue policies that sustain and support the agricultural economy.

STRATEGIES

O.2.A Define priority agricultural districts and continue to acquire and otherwise preserve land within these districts.

Farmers today are facing a variety of new challenges. As their profits decrease and speculative land values increase, they face more pressure to sell off all or part of their farmland. The Town should continue to identify, prioritize, and protect its most significant agricultural lands in order to sustain the local farming community, preserve open space, and retain its unique rural character.

O.2.B Employ Town policies to improve the economic viability of the farm community.

A variety of policies can be adopted to improve the economic viability of the farm community, including: preferential tax treatment and streamlining the permit requirements for accessory farm businesses or small scale farm-related commercial uses on agricultural lands which will enhance farmers' profits and preserve the land for future agricultural activity.

OBJECTIVE O.3 - Provide a supply of accessible, well-maintained recreational facilities that meet the changing needs of our community.

All residents of Amherst should have access to parks, greenways, and other outdoor recreation facilities, within walking distance of their homes. Parks and recreational facilities should be designed to accommodate a variety of users and activities.

STRATEGIES

O.3.A Develop shared-use agreements between the regional school department and the Town that clearly define access to and maintenance responsibilities for recreational facilities.

In order to more effectively meet the recreational needs of school children and community members alike, the Town and the regional school district should consider developing joint agreements in order to take advantage of shared recreational facilities, and split the responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of these facilities.

O.3.B Improve handicapped access to existing recreational facilities and conservation trails.

There is great diversity among the users of Amherst's recreational facilities, and accessibility must be considered when developing or renovating such facilities. The Town should ensure that all of its parks and recreation facilities are in compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility requirements. American Trails (a national non-profit) provides suggested design standards that can make conservation trail facilities more accessible to all users. (For details, see <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/accessible/index.html>.)

O.3.C Develop new, well-designed recreational facilities.

The Town needs to identify changing recreation needs so it can develop attractive new facilities to meet them. By seeking public input, unmet recreational needs can be identified, unnecessary overlaps eliminated, and collaboration among private and public providers of recreation can be coordinated. Following this analysis of needs, new recreational facilities should be planned, funded and constructed to meet the community's growing needs. These facilities will need to meet strict design, development, and maintenance standards to ensure that they are safe, attractive, and compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.

O.3.D Acknowledge and support the original plan to use the old landfill for recreational purposes.

The original capping/closing documents for the old Town dump included significant language committing Amherst to reusing the landfill site for recreation purposes. Creative reuse of the site should be explored, including an opportunity for some multi-purpose development (transfer station, DPW headquarters, etc.) along with ball fields, trails and picnic sites.

O.3.E Support the Kendrick Park Committee and a juried design competition to develop a vision for Kendrick Park.

Kendrick Park is a three-acre site located in the north end of downtown Amherst that is intended to become a landscaped park. The Design Review Board, the Planning Department, and a representative Kendrick Park Committee should initiate a process that seeks public input in identifying a

vision for the park, and then undertake a public design process to develop a final park design.

O.3.F Identify land where recreation and conservation uses can exist side by side, providing opportunities for mutually supportive activities, as at the Mill River Recreation Area.

Recreation and conservation are often seen as mutually exclusive activities in Amherst. Since the 1970's (when the Mill River Recreation Area and Greenway were created), Amherst has looked for creative ways to preserve land while expanding opportunities for passive and active recreation. The Mill River Recreation Area and Groff Park are excellent examples of projects that combine the best elements of natural resource protection and recreation (water, picnic areas, trails, ball fields, parking, pavilions, sanitary facilities, etc.). Using this model also gives Amherst the advantage of seeking funding from multiple state and federal agencies. In identifying properties suitable for new outdoor recreation facilities, priority should be given to locations where the new facilities can be directly connected to existing or new conservation areas and trail systems, to maximize opportunities for both active and passive recreation.

O.3.G Inventory old and potential new “pocket parks” and develop a plan for their restoration or development to better serve the public’s use.

Over the decades, a variety of small, informal private and public neighborhood parks have been developed in Amherst. Examples include Kiwanis Park on Stanley Street, Cow Field (the ball field at the former North Amherst School), Markert’s Pond in Orchard Valley, and the greenbelt at Pomeroy Court. The current uses and capacities of these parks should be examined and plans developed for their restoration and improvement. New potential neighborhood or urban parks and path systems should also be identified and plans made for their acquisition and development.

O.3.H Publicize national and state recreation standards to inform Amherst citizens about the relative shortfalls in Town recreational facilities.

The National Recreation and Park Association establishes and publishes standards that indicate how different types of park facilities should meet the needs of varying populations in a given geographic radius. The Town should compare its existing park facilities to these standards and to similar recreation facilities elsewhere in Massachusetts to identify shortfalls, and work with the public to generate support for developing new or improved existing recreation facilities. The Town should work to better inform the public about the importance of greenways, including the benefits they

provide in terms of recreation, alternative transportation, environmental protection, local economic contributions, improved community health, and increased property values.

O.3.I Assign increased budget priority to the management and upkeep of existing conservation and recreation properties.

Planning for future open space and recreation needs will be of little value if Amherst is not willing to adequately fund management and maintenance of the conservation lands and recreation facilities it already has.

O.3.J. Actively manage conservation lands to ensure areas of appropriate size, enhanced wildlife habitat, and assured access supporting a full range of traditional outdoor recreation and activities, including: fishing, hunting, trapping, gathering, etc.

Traditional outdoor recreation offers citizens a deep and lifelong connection to the land, and continues to be an important component of Amherst's landscape, culture, and economy. Town policies regarding the management of conservation lands, habitat, and watershed forests should seek to ensure and enhance these recreation opportunities while carefully managing their impacts.

O.3.K Encourage increased recreational program (LSSE) use of Town conservation trails and areas.

Outdoor recreation is a healthy, low-impact supplement or alternative to organized field sports. LSSE should work to create and expand recreation programs that make increased use of Amherst's extensive conservation areas.

OBJECTIVE O.4 – Institutionalize a process for rationalizing competing public land use interests.

Historically, each Town department has coordinated and overseen identification and coordination for the purchase of land and development of projects under their own separate areas of responsibility, under the direction and guidance of their respective Town boards/committees. The result has been that each area of public interest has operated largely independently of other equally important public interests. The Town is in need of an institutionalized process that can address, coordinate, and resolve competing public interests in any given parcel.

STRATEGIES

O.4.A. Develop an administrative land use review process for all Town projects.

The acquisition and development of properties for open space and recreation purposes should be pursued in coordination with other important public uses. The Town should establish and employ the administrative land use review process proposed under LU.8.A to coordinate open space and recreation land projects with other public interests, including but not limited to: community housing, preservation of historical and cultural resources, transportation, public works, and responsible economic development.

8. Services and Facilities



Master Plan

Relevant plans and policy documents:

- **Five Year Plan, Joint Capital Planning Committee [ongoing update]**
- **Climate Action Plan [October 2005]**
- **Department of Public Works Policies and Procedures**
- **Water Facilities Plan, Tighe & Bond [2001]**
- **Sewer Facilities Plan, Camp Dresser McKee [1991]**
- **Sewer Extension Master Plan [2004]**
- **Fire Station Study Committee, Report to Select Board [Sept. 18, 2006], including Site & Building Assessment Study Caolo & Bienek Associates, Inc.**
- **Open Space & Recreation Plan**
- **Most current planning documents for Police Dept.**
- **Long Range School Facilities Planning, Amherst, Massachusetts, NESDEC [Sept. 2007]**
- **Long Range Plan for Amherst Town Libraries, 2007-2010 [2007]**

A. Goal

To provide excellent, cost-effective, accessible facilities, services, and programs reflecting values respectful of our community diversity, which, through collaboration, contribute to a high quality, safe, civil, healthy, and sustainable community.

B. Overview

This chapter examines Amherst's Town services and facilities, as well as its infrastructure and public utilities. The Town has a strong interest in continuing to provide high-quality services including police, fire, public education, libraries, and social services, among others. Alternative funding sources and creative partnerships need to be pursued to ensure that these services continue to meet the high standards of community members. From an infrastructure standpoint, many of the utilities within Amherst (such as water, sewer, and stormwater systems) were designed and built for future capacities and currently remain in good condition with excess capacity. The community's infrastructure priorities focus on issues of proper maintenance, strategic extensions, and integration of new environmentally sound technologies.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into the following two sections:

- C. **Existing Conditions** provides a brief summary of Amherst's current services and facilities, including its public utilities.
- D. **Objectives and Strategies** details the policy guidelines developed through the Planning Amherst Together public involvement process.

C. Existing Conditions

An assessment of the Town's existing utilities and facilities conditions has been drawn by the consulting team based on technical research, as well as discussions with the CPC and Town Staff. The *Sewer Extension Plan Draft Report (CDM 2004)* and *Facility Plan Update Water Supply and Distribution System (Tighe&Bond 2001)* provided information to aid in the assessment of the existing water and sewer systems.

This section summarizes the key points related to the existing condition of Town services and facilities:

Public safety: The Amherst Police Department has full time police officers and coordinates with the dispatch center. The Amherst Fire Department has a force of fulltime firefighters/EMTs, call

firefighters and student firefighters dispatched from two fire stations. There are mutual aid agreements between the Amherst and UMass police, and between Amherst and neighboring communities regarding emergency medical response.

Public schools: There are approximately 1,400 students in the Amherst elementary schools (grades K-6, plus a small preschool program): Crocker Farm, Fort River, Mark's Meadow, and Wildwood. After 6th grade, Amherst students attend the Amherst-Pelham regional schools, which bring together approximately 1,785 students from Leverett, Pelham, Shutesbury, and Amherst (about 75% of the total), at the regional middle school (grades 7-8) and the regional high school (grades 9-12). Amherst's public schools have a reputation for both academic excellence (with high college enrollment rates) and diversity (elementary students include native speakers of over 30 languages and over 40% students of color).

General government: The Town provides a wide variety of basic government services including policy and day-to-day management, voter registration/elections, construction and business permitting, long-range development and conservation planning, community financial management (assessment, taxation, collections, borrowing, etc.), and health and safety inspections. Most general government services are housed in the Town Hall.

Community services: Amherst provides a wide range of community services including health services, recreation programs, information on childcare and early education, emergency assistance to low-income families, and support services for seniors, children, and veterans. Many of these services are housed in the Bangs Community Center.

Libraries: Amherst has three public libraries: the Jones Library in the downtown, the Munson Library in South Amherst, and the North Amherst Library. The library system receives a combination of public and private funding, with strong private support. These libraries receive over 350,000 visitors annually, and contain more than 210,000 books and 24,000 audio-visual items. As part of the regional lending library system, Amherst sends nearly 43,000 books/year to other communities. The Jones Library and its Special Collections section are a destination for historians, genealogists, and Emily Dickinson/ Robert Frost scholars and enthusiasts.

Public works: The Department of Public Works has a full time staff and the equipment to maintain the Town's roadways, traffic control equipment, street lighting, water, waste and drain systems, recreation areas and most of the Town's buildings, parks, and grounds.

Water, sewer, drainage, and solid waste/recycling: The Town's municipal water system provides, and the sewer system disposes, of up to 3 million gallons of water each day, servicing 93% of the homes and all of the businesses in Amherst. The Town operates a waste/recycling transfer station. These systems are self-supporting through fees and enterprise funds. Each system has some capacity for supporting growth.

Buildings and facilities: The Town owns and maintains about 600,000 sq. ft. of facilities in 65 structures. The oldest was built in 1800 (the DPW shed), the newest in 2003 (the new animal welfare facility). These include libraries, school buildings, a parking garage, fire stations, an old trolley barn now housing DPW offices, the Police Station, waste treatment plants and the Town Hall. The Town also maintains other public and recreational facilities; pools, a golf course, ball fields, historic commons, ornamental parks, and cemeteries, as well as accessory buildings and structures such as comfort stations, storage barns, playground equipment, and foot bridges.

- **Other infrastructure and Town lands -** The Town owns and maintains 98 miles of roadway, sidewalks, bike lanes and other public ways, and is also responsible for numerous bridges and culverts, and two closed landfills. Amherst maintains over 80 miles of conservation trails and actively manages numerous conservation and watershed properties to preserve habitat and mitigate the impacts of human use.

The Objectives and Strategies discussed in the remainder of this chapter provide a framework for meeting Amherst's future services and facilities needs.

D. Objectives and Strategies

This section describes the objectives and strategies that will support the Services and Facilities Goal for the Town of Amherst.

OBJECTIVE S.1 - Deliver high-quality public safety services.

Maintaining safe and secure communities is important to residents, businesses, and local governments alike. These strategies suggest ways in which the Town of Amherst can enhance the provision of public safety services, reduce crime, and improve overall perceptions of public safety.

STRATEGIES

S.1.A Support high-quality police, fire/EMS and dispatch services that are adequately staffed with trained and properly equipped personnel.

Adequate funding and staffing for police, fire, and EMS services is critical to keep residents safe. As the community continues to change and grow, expansion of these services is necessary. Different avenues of funding and service delivery should be investigated to ensure the desired quality level.

S.1.B Pursue grant funding to enable community policing and bike patrols and other opportunities to bring citizens and law enforcement together.

Community policing is based on the philosophy that greater interaction between police officers and residents can help deter crime and enlist the support of residents in promoting community safety. More foot and bike patrols can lead to familiarity and trust between police and local residents and help to create safer communities. See also H.8.C.

OBJECTIVE S.2 - Deliver high-quality education from pre-school through grade 12.

The Town of Amherst is home to four elementary schools and is part of a regional middle and high school system. The following strategies identify ways to improve educational opportunities and enhance educational facilities in the community.

STRATEGIES

S.2.A Support high-quality schools that are adequately staffed and properly equipped.

Adequate funding and staffing for Amherst's schools is essential to maintaining a high-quality education for the community's children, strong property values, and overall quality of life. Amherst is in competition with other communities for the best teachers, for instance, and, to maintain their historic excellence, Amherst's schools need appropriate levels of staffing, as well as supplies, textbooks, and equipment adequate and up to date.

S.2.B Provide adequate funding for school renovations and new facilities as recommended by the School Committee, school administration, and the Joint Capital Planning Committee.

Investments in physical facilities must be made in order to maintain a high standard of quality education in the community. The School Committee, school administration, and the Joint Capital Planning Committee have developed a set of recommendations regarding renovations of aging facilities and additional facilities required; adequate funding from the Town is necessary to ensure the completion of these projects.

S.2.C Identify appropriate land parcels for a potential new elementary school.

In selecting the location of a new elementary school, the Town should determine which sites would best meet the needs of its changing populations. Ideally, a new school should be easily accessible and serve multiple functions within the community, such as offering space for recreational opportunities and other activities. Such long-range planning is needed because the future of the Mark’s Meadow Elementary School, UMass-owned and located on the UMass campus, is in doubt. The Town will continue to pay for repairs to the building under the 2007 Agreement with the University.

OBJECTIVE S.3 – Provide high quality facilities, services, and programs that serve the needs of all the people of Amherst.

A diverse population base necessitates diversity in the services and programs provided within the community. To provide these services, the Town needs to provide adequate personnel and material resources to keep Amherst’s citizen-driven participatory government functioning.

STRATEGIES

S.3.A Maintain basic general government services at a high level of quality.

Demand for government services in Amherst is high. As Amherst becomes an increasingly attractive community for residents and visitors, the demands on general government services will increase. Amherst values and practices a strongly participatory form of citizen government. To sustain this, we need to fund and provide the resources Town staff need to support the more than 50 citizen committees that help to make Amherst government work, as well as the day-to-day work of registering voters, managing Town finances, enforcing health and safety codes, and reviewing and controlling new development.

S.3.B Continue to use Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and other available sources of revenue to help low and moderate-income families pay for childcare services.

Access to affordable childcare is a necessity for many working families. The Town should continue to use Community Development Block Grant funds and other available funds to make childcare services more affordable to low and moderate-income families.

S.3.C Support the expansion of medical facilities in Amherst in order to provide access to more comprehensive health care services.

- a. Continue to assist Hampshire HealthConnect in maintaining a satellite site which assists Amherst residents in finding free or low-cost health care.
- b. Support multi-cultural education and outreach to Amherst residents on health care issues.
- c. Encourage Cooley Dickinson Hospital to move forward on a proposed urgent-care facility on University Drive.

Providing affordable, accessible, quality health care is a growing challenge throughout the United States. Hampshire HealthConnect, has helped Amherst residents to find free or low-cost health care. The medical community, public health officials, and policymakers should work together to identify options for low-cost health care, reduce the number of uninsured residents, and improve communication and outreach so that all members of the public are fully informed about existing health care options.

S.3.D Help support social service agencies by encouraging communication, coordination, collaboration, and accountability. Seek funding to support priority services for Amherst residents in need.

Inter-agency collaboration can lead to more efficient and effective provision of social services in Amherst. When allocating funding, priority should be placed on those programs that meet the needs of low-income residents and other citizens in need.

S.3.E Expand senior services to meet the needs of a growing senior population.

The demographic trends for Amherst show significant aging of the population in the coming years from both the aging of the resident population and an influx of retirees drawn by the community's high quality services and quality of life. Amherst should carefully consider this demographic trend and look for ways to expand and improve senior services.

S.3.F Increase local enforcement of Massachusetts building and safety codes and Town regulations requiring maintenance of rental housing.

The Town should improve its enforcement of health and building codes to ensure that rental housing stock is safe and complies with state and local maintenance regulations. Housing support services can be offered to residents who report unsafe housing conditions.

S.3.G Support the activities of the Human Rights Commission.

The Human Rights Commission has a leadership responsibility in helping the community celebrate diversity, build civic pride, and promote a sense of tolerance and respect among all residents and visitors. A variety of programs – including communications strategies and community service activities – can help in promoting Amherst as a respectful and civil community.

The Commission could develop and implement programs and actions that promote a respectful and civil community, such as:

- a. Providing increased opportunities for community service and volunteer work for all Amherst residents, including students, that will encourage and reinforce a sense of civic pride.
- b. Supporting and encouraging multicultural events and activities.
- c. In all Town actions and public settings, promoting respectful and civil behavior by example, and through prompt responses to disrespectful or uncivil behavior.
- d. Promoting education and training to encourage tolerance.
- e. Fostering a culture of neighborhood civility by involving student residents in neighborhood activities and organizations.

S.3.H Maintain high-quality library services.

The Town of Amherst should maintain and enhance its library system by ensuring adequate hours, offering a wide selection of books and other media, hiring and training staff as needed, improving building facilities, and investing in technological improvements.

S.3.I Support LSSE and its program of recreation and leisure activities for Amherst residents of all ages.

Recreation opportunities and leisure activities contribute to the quality of life in Amherst. In accordance with the objectives and strategies addressed in Chapter 7, Open Space and Recreation, the Town should support the improvement, expansion, and maintenance of recreational facilities, athletic programs, and cultural events for residents of all ages. The Town should:

- a. Provide activities for youth that support a physically healthy, socially-responsible lifestyle.
- b. Develop an inventory of available community facilities and public meeting space (e.g., Library community spaces, school buildings).
- c. Develop a multi-purpose community/recreational facility (see LSSE Master Plan).
- d. Explore possible uses of the old landfill for recreation or other purposes. See O.3.D.
- e. Construct public restrooms at Kiwanis Park, Plum Brook soccer fields and other public areas.

S.3.J Improve the distribution of information about Town government to all Town residents.

In addition to the Town website, print media such as newspapers, public access television, flyers distributed to homes, and village center postings should be used to circulate Town notices and information.

S.3.K Explore the use of an information and referral system such as *First Call For Help*, through which people can get answers to questions about services, programs, and facilities in the Town.

First Call For Help is a hotline available in some communities that offers confidential information and directs callers to local providers of health and social services. The Town should explore whether such a referral system would be appropriate for Amherst. The feasibility of the program may be enhanced if the Town collaborates with neighboring communities and the hotline encompasses a broader geographic area.

OBJECTIVE S.4 Maintain and enhance Town infrastructure and facilities consistent with best practices.

To function effectively, the Town needs and expects well maintained facilities. Infrastructure should be kept in good, environmentally-sound repair to assure the safety and well-being of the community. The Town should plan, budget, and act to maintain the quality and soundness of its buildings, facilities and infrastructure.

STRATEGIES

S.4.A Maintain and repair roads sidewalks, bike paths, and bike lanes consistent with established plans.

The DPW's Pavement Management System prioritizes repairs needed for roads and sidewalks based on the existing conditions and should explicitly include bike lanes (even when part of an established roadway) and bike paths.

S.4.B Maintain wastewater facilities according to the 1991 Wastewater Facilities Plan, and update the plan as needed.

The wastewater treatment plant facilities should be maintained to ensure the quality of the effluent meets the required Federal and State standards. Septic Systems should be tested to meet Title V requirements. All maintenance and improvements made to the facilities should be in keeping with the 1991 Wastewater Facilities Plan.

Activities that pose a threat to the drinking water quality include septic systems and wastewater effluent. Source Water Assessment and Protection Reports (SWAP) are conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to assess the activities that impact the quality of drinking water sources, such as groundwater wells, surface water and aquifers. The Town should plan for routine inspections and strategic spot-checking to ensure that individual well water and septic systems meet necessary safety standards, and that affected ground water resources are protected.

S.4.C Maintain and update water facilities as appropriate to ensure high water quality standards according to the 2001 Facility Plan Update – Water Supply & Distribution System.

The DPW should use the Tighe & Bond Facility Plan Update - Water Supply & Distribution System (2001) as a guide to make upgrades and improvements to the water system and facilities as recommended. This plan should be updated every five to ten years to ensure the most accurate water demand projections are utilized for future design projects. The DPW should continue water quality testing per the Environmental Protection Agency requirements to provide high water quality to its customers.

S.4.D Study and plan for future utility extensions.

Amherst's town-owned utilities include public water, sewer, and storm drain systems, as well as street lighting. In some places (downtown Amherst) it includes wireless computer installations. The Town should coordinate its utility planning to ensure that future extensions are aligned with the community's land use, growth management, economic development, and environmental protection principles. Future sewer extensions should direct development to appropriate areas that have been designated for growth. Where possible, the Town should seek utility extension reimbursement costs from private developers.

S.4.E Plan for and make improvements to the Town's storm water and drainage systems.

The DPW should implement a Stormwater Capital Improvement Plan that prioritizes stormwater and drainage projects and upgrades based on the

need, age, and quality of the infrastructure. This plan should include existing and future areas that require stormwater treatment, such as grass swales, detention swales, ponds and infiltration structures prior to recharge of groundwater. This planning should be coordinated with new local and federal floodplain and flood way mapping.

S.4.F Continue to practice Integrated Water Resource Management.

This management should include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- a. Water conservation and leak detection.
- b. Wastewater reuse for irrigation of athletic fields.
- c. Implementation of a Stormwater Management Plan and water quality Best Management Practices.
- d. Reduction of inflow/infiltration in the wastewater collection system
- e. Watershed and aquifer land acquisition.

S.4.G Establish a program for capital maintenance of the Town's buildings and facilities, and infrastructure.

The Town should anticipate and budget for the capital maintenance needs of: 1) its 65 buildings and many non-building facilities; pools, parks, public spaces, recreational field, etc., and 2) its infrastructure, roads, bridges, utilities, etc. Since the Town can expect to use its buildings and facilities over the decades, a program anticipating capital improvements should be established. Typically 2%-5% of the replacement value of buildings and facilities or infrastructure needs to be budgeted each year for capital maintenance.

S.4.H Establish objectives for increased recycling of the waste stream and the use of life-cycle costing in municipal capital investments.

In accordance with the Climate Action Plan (see S.6.A), the Town should establish specific programs and objectives intended to significantly increase recycling of Amherst's waste stream and should also use life-cycle costing in its funding and construction of capital projects.

OBJECTIVE S.5 Anticipate, plan, and budget for large projects in response to growing demand on Town services.

The community is expecting increased levels of service from the Town in many ways. Some of these services cannot be provided for with the existing infrastructure. The Town needs to plan for and secure the resources necessary to meet the episodic demands of major projects.

STRATEGIES

S.5.A Support and implement recommendations and priorities of the Joint Capital Plan and secure adequate funding to support the Plan to avoid and reduce the backlog of deferred maintenance.

Funding for the Joint Capital Plan, other new sources of funding and fees need to be used to reduce and prevent the backlog of capital maintenance. The Town should attempt to adhere to the longstanding policy objective of allocating 10% of every annual tax levy to support the community's capital needs.

S.5.B Improve Fire/EMS response time to all areas of Town consistent with national standards with careful consideration of the Fire Station Study Committee report.

The Town should provide adequate service to all areas of Town in accordance with national standards. The recommendations of the Fire Station Study Committee can be found at the Amherst Fire Department webpage at: www.amherstma.gov/DocumentView.asp?DID=29.

An in-house study for recommended staffing-level improvements (Final Report of the Amherst Fire Department Re-Organization Study Committee, 2003) is available at: www.amherstfirefighters.org/files/fire-reorgreport.pdf.

S.5.C Support improved and expanded recreation and leisure facilities for Amherst residents.

Recreation is a vital and necessary aspect of individual physical and mental health and an important component of community social life. Amherst has acquired no new recreation properties or facilities in decades, while demand for those facilities has steadily increased. See S. 3.I.

Priorities include:

- a. Planning for, siting, and developing a multi-purpose community/recreational facility (see Open Space & Recreation Plan).
- b. Exploring possible uses of the old landfill and other underdeveloped parcels for recreation use.

S.5.D Create a new or renovated Department of Public Works facility.

The existing DPW garage and office building was originally built around 1900 as a trolley barn. Despite some recent additions and improvements, this facility suffers from long-deferred maintenance and will need to be extensively renovated to adequately support the DPW's work and meet modern building code requirements.

S.5.E Identify and secure land for new cemetery space.

The Town should assess its need for additional cemetery space, and take the necessary steps to identify and acquire new cemetery lands.

OBJECTIVE S.6 Take a leadership role in promoting environmentally sound practices in services and facilities.

The Town has a significant opportunity and responsibility to promote and demonstrate meaningful environmental policies and programs that help ensure a sustainable future for the community.

STRATEGIES**S.6.A Support the principles of the Town’s Climate Action Plan (2005) and implement its strategies.**

The Town of Amherst developed a Climate Action Plan (see <http://www.amherstma.gov/index.asp?NID=681>) in an effort to limit local greenhouse gas emissions and reduce Amherst’s role in global climate change. The plan outlines Amherst’s goals and strategies in a variety of areas, including energy use, facilities, transportation, waste management, and land use. Future updates to Town facilities and services should reflect the principles found in this document and incorporate appropriate sustainable technologies.

S.6.B Provide incentives for use of alternative sources of renewable energy (e.g., wind, solar, local biomass, thermal, fuel cells, etc.). Identify programs that will facilitate use of alternative energy sources through public and private partnerships.

The Amherst community should explore opportunities for public/private partnerships that would promote the use of alternative energy sources. Residents and businesses should be encouraged to change to alternative energy sources and providers where possible. Federal and State funding opportunities to encourage renewable energy investments should also be examined.

S.6.C Explore ways of reducing energy consumption and implementing environmentally sound practices in public buildings and facilities.

In order to play a leadership role in promoting environmentally responsible development and reducing energy consumption, the Town should undertake steps to incorporate green building technologies into new public buildings and facilities. Existing buildings should be adapted to incorporate more energy-efficient technologies. Where appropriate,

adaptive reuse of existing buildings and facilities should be accorded preference over the construction of new facilities.

S.6.D Establish a permanent standing Town committee to oversee community energy policy.

Convert the ad hoc Amherst Energy Conservation Task Force (formed to develop the Climate Action Plan) into a permanent Amherst Energy Committee capable of working with staff and other Town boards/committees to initiate, coordinate, and implement community energy policies and actions.

S.6.E Maintain street lights and upgrade the lighting system to be more energy efficient and implement “Dark Sky” concepts to reduce light pollution.

The DPW plans to update all outdated street lights in Amherst. Upgraded street lights will feature energy efficient “dark sky” fixtures that reduce light pollution.

S.6.F Encourage good health practices including regular physical activity through sound infrastructure design, public policies, and education.

Amherst can encourage healthy lifestyles among its residents through appropriate design of community infrastructure, community activities and educational programming, and land management practices which encourage and facilitate walking, biking, hiking, team sports, outdoor recreation, and other non-motorized forms of daily activity.

OBJECTIVE S.7 Strengthen partnerships with colleges and University and improve coordination of services and facilities.

The Town, the colleges, and University should strengthen their established partnerships through improved and expanded collaboration in the provision of services and facilities for their mutual benefit.

STRATEGIES

S.7.A Support mutual aid agreements between the Town and the University and colleges.

A number of recent mutual aid agreements focus on campus and community safety. Community members should continue to support this and other cooperative efforts between the Town, colleges, and the University.

S.7.B Develop programs such as public health emergency planning and coordinate community service activities.

Positive town-gown interactions can greatly contribute to safety and quality of life in Amherst. Planning for public health incidents or emergency response needs must be coordinated with educational institutions to ensure overall community safety. Additionally, the community as a whole can benefit from community service activities that promote healthy interactions between Town residents and college and university students.

S.7.C Coordinate shared use of existing facilities at Amherst and Hampshire Colleges and the University of Massachusetts.

The Town should continue to work with the University and colleges to discuss opportunities for joint recreational facility agreements. Sharing facilities, such as recreation fields, facilities, and performance and exhibition spaces, can maximize the use of existing resources and promote positive interactions between students and local residents.

S.7.D Continue town-gown collaboration regarding inappropriate and disruptive student behavior.

University and college communities experience unique challenges regarding student behavior and its effects on the community at large. Collaborative efforts should continue among all community members, Amherst police, campus police, and security services to ensure that noise, drug, and alcohol problems are effectively addressed. The Town should:

- a. Work with the colleges and University to address noise, drug and alcohol abuse and other problems.
- b. Encourage neighborhoods to work with police and with each other to control disruptive behavior.

S.7.E Negotiate payments from the colleges, University, and neighboring municipalities for their share of the cost of public safety services.

The Town of Amherst is home to a substantial student population, and often provides public safety services to address needs related to that specific population. Agreements should be reviewed periodically.

OBJECTIVE S.8 Incorporate emerging technologies such as wireless networking technology into future infrastructure planning.

The Town has made important strides in the use of new technologies. Free wireless internet access has been provided downtown. In addition, the Town has a very sophisticated GIS (geographic information system) program. The Town needs to maintain its competitive edge through acquiring and utilizing emerging new technology.

STRATEGIES

S.8.A Develop a single Town website/portal that provides citizens and businesses access to all Town services and information.

The Town should work to consolidate its resource and information systems in an easy-to-use, web-based format. Currently, the Town, the schools, the Jones Library, the Police Department, and Leisure Services all maintain separate websites.

S.8.B Provide Town departments seamless access to technology systems while in the field (e.g., Inspection Services, DPW, public safety).

Wireless technology can transform the work of Town departments and employees, allowing for direct access to data and information systems from any location. This is particularly important for employees who conduct a significant portion of their work in the field.

S.8.C Improve and expand internet communications throughout the Town to connect citizens and promote business retention and growth.

Amherst should undertake steps to ensure that all areas are covered by existing and new high-speed internet providers. The Town should also examine the possibility of extending free wireless service in strategic locations.

9. Transportation and Circulation



Master Plan

Relevant plans and policy documents:

- **Corridor Study: University Drive, State Route 9 to Amity Street** [“University Drive Corridor Study”] [December 2003]
- **Lincoln & Sunset Traffic Study** [Nov. 2006]

A. Goal

A balanced, inclusive, accessible, safe, environmentally responsible transportation and circulation system that serves users of public transit, pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers, and that is connected within and among different modes both in Amherst and the region.

B. Overview

Improved safety, accessibility, connectivity, and environmental awareness are important transportation priorities. This plan seeks to expand public transit service in a manner that is more efficient, user-friendly, and environmentally sound. The plan aims to develop policies that would reduce dependency on the private automobile, better organize parking in the downtown and village centers, improve traffic flow on major streets, and promote traffic calming in residential areas. Finally, the plan encourages more walking and biking by improving the pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure in Amherst. The objectives and strategies outlined in Part D address each of these transportation issues.

C. Existing Conditions

This section summarizes some key points related to current transportation and mobility in Amherst.

Commuting patterns: Approximately 32 percent of working residents travel outside of Amherst for employment purposes. Average commute time is 18 minutes, which is the shortest average commute in the region. A relatively large percentage of workers travel by bicycle or foot (26.1 percent), but this figure has decreased from 1990 (31.4 percent). However, the number of residents carpooling and working from home increased during the 1990s.

Roadways: There are a total of approximately 144 miles of roadway in Amherst of which 7 percent are State owned and maintained, 68 percent are Town owned and maintained, 11.5 percent are owned by local institutions, and 18 percent are unaccepted roadways. The vast majority of Amherst’s roads (86 percent) are functionally classified as local roads.

Transit and ridesharing: The Amherst region has an extensive transit service, as well as a ridesharing program known as MassRide. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority provides the primary fixed route bus and para-transit services for Hampshire and Hampden Counties. Amherst is also served by private bus lines and Amtrak. The future of the latter is in doubt.

School transportation: The Amherst-Pelham Regional Schools provide pupil transportation to and from the elementary and regional middle and high schools in Amherst and out-of-district special education programs and sites, as well as for other school activities. The regional school system has its own fleet of buses and vans driven by its own employees whose duties include other, school facilities-related tasks, and also contracts out some of its transportation responsibilities to private local bus companies.

Alternative transportation network: Amherst has an extensive network of sidewalks, bicycle lanes and pathways, and nature trails. Walking, hiking and biking are an integral part of community life and an increasingly viable alternative transportation choice.

Parking: An April 2008 Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) parking study indicates that downtown Amherst's total supply of widely-distributed private and public parking is adequate to meet its current needs, but that significant management adjustments are needed to ensure public access to that parking.

Recent policy amendments: Transportation regulations and policies in the zoning and subdivision regulations have been recently amended, and generally provide for new transportation infrastructure design and construction that is consistent with the community's scale and character. In other words, new transportation infrastructure such as roads and sidewalks are better designed to fit the specific context they are serving, whether it's the Town center, village centers, or rural areas.

Future transportation issues: Some key future mobility issues for the community are ensuring and improving continued rail service, emergency response times, projected increases in traffic volumes, and circulation changes related to potential future development in rural areas of Amherst and in abutting communities for whom Amherst serves as a regional center for employment and services.

The Objectives and Strategies discussed in the remainder of this chapter provide a coherent framework for meeting Amherst's future transportation and circulation needs with a focus on improving connectivity, enhancing alternative and public transportation options, and reducing congestion on Amherst's roadways.

D. Objectives and Strategies

This section describes the objectives and strategies that will support the Transportation goal for the Town of Amherst. For further details regarding implementation, please see Chapter 10.

OBJECTIVE T.1 Plan for an integrated town-wide transportation system.

The Town should create a coordinated plan for current and future transportation in Amherst, to organize transportation activities and allow the community to respond with least disruption to a transition away from petroleum-based transportation technologies.

STRATEGIES

T.1.A Create a Transportation Plan.

Develop a coordinated plan for transportation in Amherst, integrating provisions for the maintenance, improvement and, where appropriate, selective expansion of the current roadway system, public transit alternatives including connections to passenger rail service, bicycle paths/lanes/facilities, sidewalks and other pedestrian paths, conservation trails, and other connections. See also Objective LU.10 and associated strategies.

OBJECTIVE T.2 Actively promote alternative modes of transportation.

Promoting alternatives to automobiles will encourage healthy lifestyles and help alleviate congestion within Amherst while cutting down on air pollution. The following strategies indicate how Amherst should expand and enhance alternative transportation infrastructure so that more residents can travel to and from destinations in Amherst conveniently and safely without the use of a private car.

STRATEGIES

T.2.A Establish community-oriented transit using appropriately sized buses and vans to complement existing services.

The UMass Transit system offers student-operated bus and transportation options with a focus on routes that serve the educational communities. Amherst should examine ways to provide broader community-oriented transit throughout the town and throughout the year.

T.2.B Designate and maintain bicycle lanes of at least four feet in width on all major arterial and commuter roadways.

- Stripe and mark lanes at least annually.
- Incorporate new bicycle lanes in the repaving design of roads that currently lack sufficient width for bicycle lanes.
- Install "Share the Road" signage where bicycle lanes cannot be designated.
- Remove, repair, or replace impediments such as grates, rough pavement and potholes, overhanging mailboxes and brush, etc.

- Regularly sweep away sand and broken glass from bicycle lanes and intersections.
- Ensure that crosswalks, railroad crossings, stormwater/sewer covers, and other roadway features are bicycle-safe.

T.2.C Under the Transportation Plan, create an integrated town-wide system of new and expanded sidewalks and bicycle routes linking together the community’s existing transportation system and providing access throughout Amherst.

- Require new developments to link to existing pedestrian connections.
- Develop and integrate a town-wide network of sidewalks, connector footpaths, bicycle paths and multi-use trails.
- Design and implement streetscape improvements for downtown and village centers.
- Ensure that all bus stops are safely accessible to pedestrians.
- Expand and improve the following specific sections of the pedestrian sidewalk network:
 - South East Street (Colonial Village to College Street)
 - East Pleasant Street (Village Park to Eastman Lane)
 - East Hadley Road (South Pleasant Street to Columbia Drive)
 - Pomeroy Village (West Street, Pomeroy and West Pomeroy Lanes)
 - Old Farm Road (Cross Brook to Pine Grove).

See LU.10, E.1.C, E.3.C, O.1.C, S.4.A and S.6.F.

T.2.D Improve the safety and comfort of pedestrian spaces and paths.

- Maintain smooth walking surfaces and prioritize sidewalks in need of repair of cracks, potholes, and tree root upheavals.
- Maintain clearly marked crosswalks at intersections of high pedestrian traffic that do not have pedestrian signals.
- Provide adequate street lighting in downtown, village centers, and neighborhoods.
- Switch current pedestrian signals to “countdown”-style signals, allowing adequate time for the elderly and handicapped to cross.
- Enforce timely snow removal in downtown, village centers, and neighborhoods.

T.2.E Make village centers bicycle friendly and pedestrian friendly.

- Site motor vehicle parking in the rear of commercial buildings.
- Incorporate bike lanes, sidewalks, and/or multi-use paths into existing public ways.

- Minimize driveway openings.
- Create and maintain well-marked pedestrian crossings and pedestrian-activated traffic signals.
- Provide ample bicycle parking, adequate street lighting, and benches.

T.2.F Make infrastructure improvements to support alternatives to the use of the private automobile.

- Provide shelters, benches, and bicycle racks at all major bus stops in Amherst to encourage more widespread use of the bus system.
- Build well-lit, sheltered, and easily visible parking/storage facilities for bicycles at destination sites such as downtown, village centers, shopping areas, bus stops, and possible new park-n-ride lots.

T.2.G Pursue retention and improvement of Amherst's existing passenger and freight rail service.

Work with other communities, institutions of higher learning, and regional and state entities to:

- Retain and improve Amherst's existing Amtrak passenger rail service.
- Improve the New England Central rail lines providing access to Amherst from the south and the north.
- Support development of the town of Palmer as the site for a major railroad hub providing passenger and freight rail service and connections between Amherst and Boston, Springfield, Albany, and points south along the New England Central, including UConn Storrs and New London.
- To enhance passenger use of rail travel in Amherst, support and plan for redevelopment/improvement of the area around the Amherst Depot as a mixed-use center.

T.2.H Utilize maps, guides, and instructional materials to promote alternative transportation modes.

- Produce and distribute maps of pedestrian routes, trails, and footpaths.
- Create multimodal access guides showing intersections of pedestrian, bicycle, and bus routes.
- Create guides identifying major destination points within Amherst and in the nearby area, with instructions on how to reach them by foot, bicycle, or bus, and noting whether they are handicapped accessible.

- Produce instructional videos to air on ACTV on how to use alternative transportation in Amherst and how to get to major destination points.

-

T.2.I Create "smart" transit stops.

- Pursue the introduction of “smart” transit stops, which use GPS technology to track the location of transit vehicles and display accurate wait times to riders waiting at transit stops.
- Use smart stops to provide directions and information about businesses, attractions, and events in the immediate vicinity, and throughout Amherst.

T.2.J Experiment with other ways to encourage non-motorized transportation.

- On a trial basis, close one or two blocks of the downtown area for special Town events such as a Street Fair, Arts and Craft Fair, Harvest Festival, “Walk About Town Day.”
- Organize a guaranteed ride home program to ensure that public transit riders can get home in an emergency.
- Adopt a “Safe Routes to School” program:
[www.http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/saferoutes/](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/saferoutes/) .
- Promote bicycling and walking to school, possibly as an alternative to physical education requirements.
- Consider using locations with excess parking such as schools, churches, etc., for off-hours shared parking, or park-n-ride services for special events.
- Lobby the Massachusetts legislature to change the excise tax to a mileage-based system that would encourage drivers to consider transportation alternatives.

OBJECTIVE T.3 Increase the frequency, connectivity, and utility of public transit services to meet the needs of residents throughout the community.

Greater frequency of service and routes that extend throughout the community are essential to ensuring the widespread use of public transportation.

STRATEGIES

T.3.A Establish a north-south bus route that offers daily service year round and connects to routes serving other neighborhoods and village centers.

An important long-term transportation goal should be the provision of year-round, daily, express bus service along a north-south spine. It would

link downtown and other points on the route with other village centers and outlying neighborhoods by connecting to east-west local service shuttle loops or flex routes at nodes along the spine.

T.3.B Pursue local and regional improvements to transit service connectivity.

- Revise Amherst bus schedules as necessary to facilitate transfers between routes.
- Coordinate schedules, stops, and frequency of service of Amherst-based transit system with other bus and rail transit systems in the region.
- Work with PVTA and other regional provider to develop dedicated, regular bus service between Amherst and the planned new north-south rail stop in Northampton.
- Advocate for expanded and more direct bus service from Amherst to other major employment centers in the region.

T.3.C Provide seasonal bus service to major off-road hiking and biking trailheads.

To promote public access to natural areas and encourage the use of recreational amenities in the Amherst area, seasonal bus services should be scheduled along major off-road hiking and biking trailheads.

T.3.D Extend Rack And Roll systems (bike racks) to all buses in the system.

Providing convenient storage for bikes on buses can encourage inter-modal transit options for commuting and accommodate alternative transportation to and from trailheads for recreational bikers.

OBJECTIVE T.4 Observe transportation demand management principles in local planning and regulation.

“Transportation demand management” (TDM) is a traffic management approach that seeks to influence drivers’ choices by reducing or redistributing the number of vehicles on the road and increasing mobility options. Planning policies and land use regulations are essential components of TDM. In order for public and alternative transportation to be viable and help reduce automobile traffic, regulations influencing land use and development patterns must allow for higher densities and a mix of uses, as in village centers, and roadway design that supports a variety of users. Amherst should revise its zoning and subdivision regulations to promote infill and direct new development toward appropriate locations and to allow densities sufficient to support viable public transit.

STRATEGIES

T.4.A Use zoning bylaws, subdivision regulations, and permitting board project review to advance transportation goals.

- Adopt zoning provisions, subdivision regulations, and other policies that require large-scale retail and housing developments to be accessible by public transit (and discourage development in areas without transit access).
- Encourage dense, mixed-use residential or commercial development in village centers, with appropriately-designed streets, sidewalks, limited parking, etc., to maximize access to public transit and encourage transit ridership.
- Require the provision of facilities for alternative means of transportation and efficient provision of parking in subdivisions, and site plan review and special permit projects.
- Expand the mandated development review requirements for traffic impact studies to include transportation impact and access studies.
- Require transportation demand management programs as part of mitigation for large development projects.

T.4.B Adjust existing regulations to help reduce the number of cars in the downtown area.

- Expand the Municipal Parking District (within which selected uses are exempt from parking requirements) to other areas of the downtown and village centers.
- Remove or reduce parking requirements in the Zoning Bylaw for most residential and commercial development in the downtown area in order to increase density, maximize the area available for residential and commercial development, and create a vital pedestrian atmosphere.
- Increase shared parking and off-site parking for residential and commercial development where applicable, by expanding on existing zoning regulations and pursuing public/private agreements.

T.4.C Create a “traffic-shed” computer model that can evaluate short- and long-term impacts of new development on existing roadways.

Consider working with UMass to establish an on-going transportation modeling program for the community.

OBJECTIVE T.5 Within the context of community transportation demand management planning, provide adequate public parking to support existing and desired new development in the downtown and elsewhere.

Amherst is a regional center for numerous outlying communities only some of which are served by public transit. Both during and after the transition away from an oil-based economy, parking for personal vehicles will continue to be a necessary form of infrastructure for the downtown, village centers, and commercial areas.

STRATEGIES

T.5.A Make changes in parking policies to organize the public parking supply more efficiently.

- Inventory existing downtown parking to assess current parking patterns, demand, and availability.
- Encourage employers to offer parking permits to employees.
- Restructure metered parking into zones with a tiered fee structure such that the most convenient parking is the most short-term and more expensive than areas further away from downtown.
- Consider applying a progressive price structure to meters with three-hour limits or more.
- Set meter rates so that a minimum percentage (15%?) of parking spaces remains open during peak periods.
- Increase parking revenue by adding meters on Town streets near University of Massachusetts.

T.5.B Evaluate existing downtown public and private parking areas for reorganization, management, enhancement, or potential redevelopment as multi-modal facilities, preferably in concert with private mixed-used redevelopment of adjacent streetfront areas.

Areas to include in this evaluation include, but are not limited to, the Boltwood Walk parking garage, CVS lot, Amity Street lot, parking sites at the north end of downtown, in the interior of the East Pleasant/Triangle/Pray Street block, and the Amherst College alumni parking lot south of Spring Street.

T.5.C Plan for meeting current and future transportation demand through off-street multi-modal facilities providing a range of services.

Where appropriate, multi-modal facilities should include such amenities as:

- Automobile parking.

- Public transit/shuttle stops.
- Full service public transit terminals.
- Access to rail transit.
- Pedestrian facilities and directional information.
- Bicycle parking, secure storage, and changing rooms/showers.
- Rentals of bicycles, Zip cars or the like.
- Recharging stations for hybrid/electric vehicles.

OBJECTIVE T.6 Improve the flow of traffic on major roadways and residential streets to reduce congestion and improve safety.

Amherst should make an effort to better coordinate traffic signals and invest in intersection improvements, in order to facilitate traffic flow.

STRATEGIES

T.6.A Install, relocate, utilize, and evaluate effectiveness of available traffic control systems.

The street and traffic signs in Amherst need better visibility, clearer displays, and greater overall consistency. Traffic control settings should be adjusted to take into account traffic volume, time of day, type of pavement, needs of elderly and handicapped pedestrians, needs of bicyclists, etc., and should be periodically monitored for efficiency and effectiveness.

T.6.B Adjust traffic circulation patterns.

A variety of methods should be considered for adjusting the traffic circulation patterns in Amherst. These should include, where appropriate:

- Converting streets to one-way traffic flow
- Limiting left (or right) turns
- Clearly marking tow-away zones with NO PARKING/STANDING signs and pavement markings
- Four-way stops
- Installing traffic-calming measures, especially in congested areas.

T.6.C Develop, publicize, and apply traffic calming guidelines for residential neighborhoods and commercial districts.

There are many traffic-calming methods and devices that can be used by the Town to reduce vehicle speed, improve safety and balance the use of public right-of-ways between motorized vehicles and other modes of transportation. Roundabouts, semi-diverters, neck-downs, corner radii treatments, and diagonal diverters are some common examples, among others, that should be encouraged in local land use regulations, public infrastructure standards and projects, and design guidelines for new development.

T.6.D Improve roadway signs.

- Place signs so that they are readily visible and do not block visibility of other signs.
- Use fewer signs, or install multiple signs on a single pole wherever possible.
- Install clearly visible and readable signs, such as eight-inch, reflective street name signs at entrances to streets.
- Expand and improve way-finding signs at major intersections and destination points.
- Clearly display speed limit signs.

T.6.E Adopt a Town policy of “Complete Streets” for all reconstruction or new construction of streets.

www.completestreets.org

Complete streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and bus riders of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across a complete street. Amherst should adopt a Town policy of incorporating the elements of complete streets into any new construction or reconstruction of roadways.

OBJECTIVE T.7 Engage in traffic management initiatives with businesses and employers.

The following strategies recommend initiatives to educate the public about traffic management, with a particular focus on working with the business community, employers, and transportation stakeholders to reduce single-occupant vehicle trips and provide incentives for using public and alternative transportation.

STRATEGIES

T.7.A Re-establish a Transportation Management Association to educate employers and the public about commuting options and incentives.

Transportation management programs in rural areas are typically difficult to organize and sustain. However, Amherst has a unique opportunity with the five colleges and other major employers in the region. The Town should initiate the process of reestablishing the TMA by organizing a committee with representatives from each of the colleges, surrounding communities, PVTA and possibly the Area Chamber of Commerce. The MassRides program should also be involved in providing ride-matching and informational assistance to students, employees,

commuters, and other travelers as they have done for other TMAs such as the South Shore and Logan Airport.

T.7.B Distribute information on the benefits of an active and all-inclusive program of traffic management throughout the Town.

Consult with organizations involved in transportation management such as PVPC, MassRides, DHCD, DOT, Urban Land Institute, American Planning Association, Congress of New Urbanism, and others regarding literature and other materials that can be used as models for Amherst.

T.7.C Encourage transportation options to reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips.

- Encourage UMass and the Town of Amherst to organize car-sharing options, such as Zipcar, for employee use during the workday.
- Install a car-sharing station, such as Zipcar, downtown. Promote this option by offering free parking for these vehicles.
- Create park-n-ride lots in outlying areas that would serve commuters as well as visitors traveling to downtown and UMass. Ensure that these lots are adequately served by public bus routes or shuttles.
- Pursue the introduction of Independent Transportation Network for elders (www.itnportland.org).
- Provide zoning or tax incentives for installation of shower facilities and bicycle parking for bicycle or pedestrian commuters to downtown or village center employment.

OBJECTIVE T.8 Aggressively pursue funding strategies for achieving transportation goals.

Amherst should undertake a variety of initiatives to enhance its access to transportation funding. These may include applying for additional federal and state funds, engaging in lobbying activities, and instituting local policy changes in order to generate additional transportation revenues for the Town.

STRATEGIES

T.8.A Lobby the State Legislature for additional funding for regional transit services.

Organize a lobbying committee to inform local and regional state legislatures of the need for additional transit services and to determine and pursue the best approaches with the state in seeking additional funds.

T.8.B Apply for federal and state grants through PVPC as a source of financial support for public transportation enhancements.

In addition to seeking additional operational funds to expand the regional transportation system above, the Transportation Management committee should work with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to seek funding for public transportation enhancements such as attractive bus shelters, improved signage and route mapping boards, bicycle facilities, and other capital projects that encourage more ridership and improve public transportation.

T.8.C Enact residential- and business-unit permit fees for village center and downtown development projects to support public transportation.

The purpose of this fee would be to provide for expanded public transportation and enhancements to the system on established routes. Since development is generally encouraged in designated growth centers such as the villages and downtown area, this fee could be coupled with other incentives to reduce private vehicle use such as a reduction of on-site parking, shared parking agreements, and permitting for peripheral public parking spaces for downtown and village residents.

T.8.D Explore the potential for parking overlay districts in the downtown and village centers with payment-in-lieu-of-parking provision.

Allowing developers to pay a fee or other consideration in lieu of providing new parking spaces can reduce the amount of on-site and isolated parking lots in downtown and village centers, while still providing adequate parking for commercial and residential uses. The fee could be used to expand or enhance public parking facilities available to all user groups and improve public transportation facilities and services. The fee structure should be based on the estimated cost of constructing a new parking space. Funds collected should be directed to the Transportation Enterprise Fund, which funds the maintenance, expansion and enhancement of public parking and transportation.

T.8.E Lobby for amendments in state regulations governing property assessment and taxation to allow land devoted to parking to be taxed at the same rate as land used for other development.

Taxing parking lots at a lower rate than developed land discourages useful redevelopment of those properties, encourages the development of excessive parking, and supports the continued use of private vehicles. The basis for setting assessments of property value is established under state law, so state action will be needed to accomplish this end.

10. Implementation



Master Plan

Relevant plans and policy documents:

- ***Financial Management Policies & Objectives, Town of Amherst [2007]***
- ***Amherst Visions: An Interim Report [1998]***
- ***Final Report of the Select Committee on Goals [SCOG] [1973]***

Introduction

Under Massachusetts state law the Amherst Planning Board has the authority to create and update a Master Plan for Amherst. The *Planning Amherst Together* process engaged hundreds of residents in a broad, collaborative effort to develop a Master Plan. Once the Plan is adopted the community will need to shift its energies towards successful implementation of the strategies it has identified.

This chapter of the Master Plan provides guidance for maintaining accountability, monitoring activities, creating appropriate development regulations and procedures, and involving the community in implementation of the Plan. It recommends a number of actions to support effective implementation of the Master Plan for the Town of Amherst. Following this Introduction it is divided into the following sections.

1. How to Use this Plan summarizes the basic steps for how the Plan should be used to affect public and private decision-making in Amherst.

2. Actions outlines objectives and a series of supporting actions that will facilitate implementation of the Plan. The objectives touch upon the following broad implementation considerations:

- **Provide resources for implementing the Plan.** Beginning with the Priority Implementation steps outlined in Chapter 2, the Town should secure and allocate the funding necessary to implement priority actions, through updating the Capital Plans and annual departmental budgets.

Monitor and evaluate implementation. Implementation will be monitored on a regular basis, including evaluating, reporting results, promoting successes, and maintaining public and media relations.

Involve a wide variety of stakeholders in implementation.

Residents and other stakeholders shall be actively involved with implementing the Plan.

Develop appropriate regulatory tools to implement the Plan.

The Town of Amherst should update key development regulations and processes for plan review.

Require concurrence with the Plan. The Town shall require concurrence with the Master Plan in rezoning or development approvals, and call for written interpretations of decisions in order to create a public record for consistency.

Update the Plan every five years. The Town of Amherst should develop a community process to update the Plan at a minimum of every five years.

An Implementation Matrix is included in the Appendix which organizes the Master Plan strategies into a simplified chart format. Above and beyond

the Priority Implementation actions listed in Chapter 2, the matrix provides a format for Town policy-makers to use in moving from a ‘work list’ to action plans under each area of public interest that identify who will be responsible for and involved in implementation, and what the timelines should be for undertaking specific strategies.

A. How to Use the Plan

The Plan is to be used on a regular basis as public and private decisions are made concerning development, redevelopment, capital improvements, economic incentives, and other matters affecting the community. The following is a summary of how it should be used.

1. Annual Work Programs and Budgets

Individual departments and administrators should be cognizant of the recommendations of the Plan when preparing annual work programs and budgets. Several strategies can be implemented in this way. Review of these work programs by Select Board, Town Manager, Town Meeting, Finance Committee, School Committee, School Superintendent, Library Trustees and Library Director should likewise occur in accordance with the Plan’s strategies.

2. Development Approvals

Administrative and legislative approvals of development proposals, including rezoning and subdivision plats, should be a central means of implementing the Plan. In fact, zoning codes can and should be updated in response to regulatory strategies presented in the Plan.

3. Capital Plans

Annual and five-year capital plans should be consistent with the Plan’s land use policies and infrastructure recommendations. New improvements that are not reflected in the Plan – and which could dramatically impact the Plan’s land use recommendations – should necessitate at least a minor update to the Plan.

4. Economic Incentives

Economic incentives such as Economic Opportunity Areas (EOAs) enabling tax increment financing (as has been developed for the Cushman General Store and Atkins Farm Market) should be reviewed in light of recommendations of the Plan. These incentives should be integrated with other Plan policies to ensure consistency, particularly with the Plan’s land use recommendations.

5. Private Development Decisions

Property owners and developers should consider the recommendations of the Plan in their planning and investment decisions. Public decision-

makers will be using the Plan as a guide in their development-related deliberations, such as zoning matters and infrastructure requests. Property owners and developers should have an understanding of the Master Plan when submitting proposals to public bodies.

6. Future Interpretation

The Planning Board and other responsible entities should provide a written interpretation of major items that are unclear or which are not fully addressed in the Plan. These bodies may call upon outside experts and other groups for advice.

B. Actions

Outlined below are the strategies which support the implementation of the Plan. For their successful implementation, each strategy will require development of a timeframe and identification of key entities responsible for implementation, including Town departments, boards and committees, and appropriate others. A matrix of this Plan's strategies is included in the Appendix.

<p>OBJECTIVE IM.1 Provide sufficient resources to implement the Master Plan.</p>

<p>The Plan identifies the need to provide adequate resources to implement certain strategies. For the successful completion of many strategies, new resources will need to be obtained; for others, reallocating existing resources may be appropriate.</p>
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STRATEGIES

IM.1.A Develop a Long-term Financial Planning Process.

The Town should conduct a public process for determining short- and long-term financial priorities for the operating and capital budget needs of the community, in coordination with the policies, objectives, and strategies of this Plan.

IM.1.B Update Capital Plans based on the Master Plan.

Five year capital Plans will be updated in line with the Master Plan. A Capital Plan is a fundamental management document that outlines projected capital needs, funding estimates and sources, and timeframes for completion. In updating Capital Plans each year, the Town should monitor implementation to ensure that they are consistent with the recommendations of the Master Plan.

IM.1.C Prepare annual departmental work programs and operating budgets with awareness of the Master Plan.

Departmental work programs and operating budgets will demonstrate consistency with the Master Plan.

IM.1.D Identify and secure funds for prioritized initiatives. (This could include grants, tax measures, bonds, private investments, etc.)

Funding efforts should focus specifically on those strategies that the community has identified as being of high priority. Funding may come from the Town, other governmental sources (state, federal), tax measures, private sector investment, or a combination thereof. The community should seek to maximize the use of non-municipal resources. This strategy should occur in line with annual budget cycles.

IM.1.E Award economic and regulatory incentives based on consistency with the Master Plan.

The Town of Amherst will determine appropriate economic and regulatory incentives that could be instituted to achieve critical development and redevelopment objectives, as recommended by the Master Plan

IM.1.F Monitor and ensure fiscal accountability.

The Town of Amherst will monitor and ensure fiscal accountability in undertaking all of its responsibilities, including those associated with implementation of the Master Plan.

OBJECTIVE IM.2 Monitor and evaluate implementation.

Implementation of the Plan will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis. This will ensure that the Plan is successfully followed and will result in desired changes in the community. Specific activities will include issuing an annual report and publicizing examples of successful implementation.

STRATEGIES**IM.2.A Form a Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) to oversee implementation of the Master Plan.**

The new Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) will be a successor to the CPC, responsible for helping to direct plan implementation. MPIC will work with responsible Town boards/committees and departments to identify responsible entities and a timeframe for specific strategies. The Committee will monitor and regularly report on the progress of implementation efforts.

IM.2.B Prepare and issue bi-annual reports that summarize the status of all Master Plan actions.

Working with the Planning Board and others as necessary, MPIC will develop and issue a bi-annual Master Plan report to the community and the media at a public meeting, on the Town website, and through other means. The report will summarize the status of implementation of all Master Plan strategies. It will highlight key strategies that have been completed over the

course of the previous two years. It will also identify emerging issues and any delays in implementation or conflicts between strategies that need to be addressed by the community. Changes or additions to the Plan will also be highlighted in the report, including any new priority implementation steps recommended by the Planning Board. MPIC will also issue or facilitate periodic bulletins or notices regarding significant Master Plan actions.

OBJECTIVE IM.3 Involve a wide variety of stakeholders in implementation.

As implementation of the Master Plan gets underway, the Town of Amherst will collaborate with a host of stakeholders. This will include local boards and commissions, community organizations, and other parties with particular interest in specific objectives and strategies. Such partnerships will be critical to successful implementation of the Plan.

STRATEGIES

IM.3.A Identify and engage non-governmental partners to assist with implementation.

Responsible staff and committees will identify and engage non-government partners to assist in implementing key strategies of the Plan. These partners will include citizens, civic organizations, institutions, and businesses. These partners will be critical to success. For particular strategies the Town may decide to appoint a public-private task force to lead implementation.

IM.3.B Establish a program to provide ongoing public education on the Plan.

The residents of Amherst can also play an important role in implementing the Master Plan. Public participation has been a significant component in the development of the Plan. The MPIC should create a public outreach and education program to provide residents with ongoing opportunities to become familiar with the Plan, and to understand their role in achieving the goals in the Plan. The Town's web site can continue to be an important source of information and interaction.

IM.3.C Provide ongoing educational opportunities on innovative planning and development practices for the MPIC, Planning Board, Select Board, and other elected and appointed officials.

The Plan calls for some innovative development concepts. Town staff should organize educational programs and materials that provide examples from other communities. These programs may include site visits to other communities to observe firsthand development projects that may serve as appropriate examples for Amherst.

IM.3.D Provide final copies of the Master Plan on the Town web site and at libraries.

Upon completion and approval, final copies of the Master Plan will be made available via the Town website as part of the education and outreach process. Making these documents available on the website will also allow developers and property owners to become familiar with the Plan and its development recommendations.

OBJECTIVE IM.4 Develop appropriate regulatory tools to implement the Master Plan.

The Master Plan has identified the need for updated development regulations that are aligned with the community's land use objectives. Adopting new regulatory tools will facilitate plan implementation.

STRATEGIES

IM.4.A Update development regulations as recommended in the Master Plan.

Amherst's development regulations will be updated as recommended in the Plan. For example, the Town should update its zoning code and development ordinances to ensure that regulations reflect the community's vision for future land use, resource preservation, and appropriate types of development.

IM.4.B Monitor the implementation of new regulations and correct as needed.

As new regulations are used, the outcomes will be monitored to determine if the regulations are achieving the expected results as recommended in the Master Plan. If the outcomes are not as expected, the regulations will be modified as appropriate.

OBJECTIVE IM.5 – Require concurrence with the Master Plan.

Future decisions in the community regarding development, capital improvements, and budgeting will concur with the applicable provisions of the Master Plan and the Capital Plan.

STRATEGIES

IM.5.A Require concurrence in rezonings and other major development approvals.

Major development approvals and rezonings will concur with the applicable policies of the Master Plan. All such applicable actions by boards, commissions, and staff shall document such concurrence in all decisions. A

summary of Master Plan compliance will be included as part of the annual report of every Town board/committee and department.

IM.5.B Require written interpretations of the Plan by the Planning Board.

Upon request, interpretation of the policies of the Plan should be prepared in writing to create a public record. This will ensure consistency in applying these planning documents in day-to-day situations. Such interpretations made by the Planning Board will be shared with other entities to determine concurrence on the interpretation. This may be coordinated by staff or addressed at a joint work session.

IM.5.C Require staff reports to reference the Master Plan.

All staff reports related to policy recommendations, annual work programs, and budgets shall reference relevant Master Plan recommendations.

OBJECTIVE IM.6 – Update the Master Plan at least every five years.

The Master Plan shall be formally updated on a 5-year basis. This is a sufficient timeframe within which to consider changing conditions that may affect the Plan's policies. If circumstances in the community change abruptly, the Planning Board shall initiate an update in a shorter timeframe, as necessary.

STRATEGIES

IM.6.A Design the Master Plan updating process.

The Planning Board, advised by MPIC, will design a process by which the Master Plan will be updated. The Board will also work with staff to determine the resources necessary for undertaking an update and shall recommend the funding and other resources needed to the Select Board.

IM.6.B Prepare an updated Master Plan.

MPIC will lead the process to update the Master Plan, with oversight by the Planning Board. The process should incorporate public involvement similar to the effort to prepare this plan. Other aspects of the process shall be defined as well. The total process for completing and adopting the update should take less than 18 months.

